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EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL COMMENTARY

ON

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Of our Lord Jesus Christ.

INTENDED CHIEFLY AS A HELP TO FAMILY DEVOTION.

EDITED AND CONTINUED

BY THE REV. W. DALTON, B. D.

INCUMBENT OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, WOLVERHAMPTON.

VOL. I.

CONTAINING THE GOSPELS AND ACTS.

THIRD EDITION.

Seeleys,

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PREFACE.

"The following work was undertaken for the assistance of those who value the ordinance of family worship. It will be found to contain explanatory and practical lectures on the New Testament, conveyed in such plain, intelligible language as will best suit the capacities of the various branches of a family." This may suffice to explain the design of the author in undertaking this commentary; it remains for me to state the reasons which induced me to enter on the responsible task of revision.

Having been conversant with the circumstances under which this work was commenced, I felt a more than ordinary interest in its progress, and I was thankful to find that as each part was completed and published, it obtained an extensive circulation—its scriptural tone and great simplicity seem to have commended the work as well adapted to family devotion. One great disadvantage however usually attends the publication of works in parts or numbers. The mind of the writer is often distracted by subjects of an uncongenial kind, and the interest of the reader is greatly diminished by the necessary delay. In this case, the intervals which elapsed between the publication of the different parts, had a serious effect on the work itself. The tone and simplicity of the first volume was not sustained in the second. Many parts of the Epistles were but slightly touched upon, and the comments on the rest were evidently written during a pressure of ministerial engagements, or unpropitious events. It was therefore very generally felt, that a revision and continuation were required to complete the work, and it may be regarded as a remarkable coincidence, that the publishers, on the decease of the estimable author, called me to this

work, without being aware that I had been so much occupied in looking over the earlier part of the exposition.

It has not appeared expedient to mark the alterations made in this revision—suffice it to say, that the first edition has been selected as the basis of all my editorial labors. In the first volume, the largest portion of the original matter has been preserved—occasionally short paragraphs have been omitted, and new matter introduced—in some instances, the lectures have been subdivided, and a fuller exposition given to each part. In revising the second volume, I found it necessary to make still greater alterations. The author appears to have thought it impossible to give anything like a satisfactory view of the inspired epistles in the short compass of these lectures, and, therefore, often merged the explanatory part in the practical. This gave an unfinished aspect to the second volume. The editor's labours had, therefore, to tend rather towards a continuation than a revision. The union of plain exposition with deep, practical application of truth, so happily pervading the first volume, was once more to be attempted.

To remedy the deficiency just mentioned, the first necessary step was to take a smaller portion of the sacred word for each lecture, and thus, without lengthening the exposition to an undue extent, a greater scope was given for *explanatory* comments. In many instances this was easily effected; but in the Epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews, and a large portion of the book of Revelation, I found it necessary to remodel the whole, and to write the exposition *de novo*, retaining as much of the original matter as could be made available in so extensive a change. An amount of responsibility thus devolved on me, which I had little expected, when I undertook the work. How far I have been able to carry out the original features of this commentary, or expound a large portion of the sacred volume with simplicity, faithfulness and conciseness, it is not for me to decide. The deep responsibility of commenting on the words of the living God, has often weighed me down—the feeling of creature-incompetency has never in any period of my life been more painfully experienced. But I have done what I could. I feel thankful to my heavenly Father who has often heard my prayer, and given me help in this arduous work, and to his gracious benediction I commend my poor labours, under the deep persuasion that we write in vain and read in vain, where God is not with us in the quickening energy of the Spirit of truth.

In the present day there is a great temptation to regard commentaries on the Word of God in a wrong light. Some would set them aside altogether, and even intimate a doubt of their lawfulness and value. These objections are, however very inconsistent. Every sermon and conversation on the word of life may be regarded as a commentary, and yet few, if any, consider themselves independent of such helps. Such objections are productive of evil effects: they almost invariably lead to confined meagre views of divine truth, and a great scantiness of biblical knowledge. Others are inclined to depend too implicitly on favourite commentators, and to receive their explanation of the scriptures without further inquiry. The consequences must be disastrous: the teaching of the Divine Comforter is not sought in earnest prayer—the soul is not nourished by the sincere milk of the word, nor the inner man moulded according to the expansive requirements of a holy God. The true wisdom lies in avoiding all such extremes: we should use the many helps which God has bestowed, without leaning on any arm but his own. The explanations of man will then be kept in their true position; they will be resorted to as a means to an end. The channel of appointed ordinances will then lead us up to the very fountain head of truth: the inspired word will then be found "able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

It is only necessary to add, that to the original work, forms of prayers for family worship were appended; these extended to one month, besides forms of prayer and thanksgiving for the Christian festivals and various occasions, and were equally distributed in the two volumes. All this arrangement has been allowed to remain, and the alterations have been confined to a few phrases and words.

W. D.

In the Second Edition, some alterations have been made. The whole of the sacred text of the New Testament has been inserted, and by a judicious arrangement of the page, the publishers have been able to make this valuable addition without increasing the expence of the work. For the convenience of family reading, the lectures have been still further subdivided, and hence some portions of the Epistles have been more fully explained. This has required the introduction of fresh comments to a considerable amount. Biblical criticism has been attempted for the first time. A few notes explanatory of Greek phrases and expressions, have been added at the bottom of the page, or at the end of the lectures. In this way, the practical nature of the work has been retained: the English reader need not be interrupted in his course, and yet difficulties may have been elucidated by the assistance of the original language. In this edition the references to the ancient commentators have been more frequent, and the writers who have given a full explanation of particular subjects, have been carefully noted.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

When the publishers informed me that another edition of this practical Commentary on the New Testament was required, I felt it to be my duty to revise the whole with great care. First, because it is the duty of a Commentator, however humble his pretensions may be, to put forth nothing that is crude and undigested—nothing, in fact, but what he conscientiously believes is in accordance with the mind of the Spirit. And, secondly, because this work being increasingly used in family worship and for private meditation, I felt anxious to make it as useful as I could. This has been my great aim and prayer—and humbly but sincerely do I praise the Great Head of the Church, if he has permitted me to be a help to any in their enquiry into the meaning and power of the Word of the living God.

Generally speaking, the expository part of this Commentary remains the same as in former editions. In a few instances, I have been led to take a different view of difficult passages, but I am thankful to add, that these instances are very few. To the practical parts, I have made several additions—by inserting more lengthened observations—which a further division of some chapters permitted me to do, without making the lectures too prolix.

The chief additional matter is contained in the notes at the bottom of the pages or at the close of the lectures. I commenced this mode of elucidating difficulties in the last edition, without interrupting the plain and practical strain of the lectures. This proved acceptable to many readers, and especially to many of my brethren in the ministry. In this edition I have given great attention to this concise exposition of difficulties, and I have referred the reader to those writers who have discussed the passages more fully.

For the first time an Index has been added to these volumes, with the design of facilitating reference to important subjects, especially when the reader may not be able to recollect the chapters where they occur.

W. D.

April, 1848.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

We have now before us the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—a name which is applied to the second part of the Holy Bible—it being the testament or will of the Lord Jesus to his beloved church.

If we retain, as in our translation, the word "Testament," we are led to contemplate all the blessings of the gospel dispensation, as conveyed to us in the will and bequest of the great Head of the church; which he has sealed with his own blood. In this view the Lord Jesus far exceeds all other testators—not only because the contents of his will are of eternal moment, and theirs of a transitory nature; but because other testators must die to make their wills valid, and, when dead, must leave the administration to others; not so with the Lord Jesus. He died indeed, and thereby confirmed his testament; but he ever liveth to see the whole purposes of his will fulfilled—so that this charter of grace is well called, "The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The word which is rendered "Testament," may also be translated "Covenant,"—and considering that the word is adopted from the Jewish dispensation and scriptures, we may conclude that "Covenant" is the proper term for both portions of the Bible. God has in infinite mercy considered our state and misery in the counsels of Eternity. All the wants and miseries of his people have been before his prescient eye, and he has made full provision for their relief in the purposes of his ever-

lasting love. In due time the counsels of a tri-une Jehovah were unfolded to us, by his own perfect revelation. With many minor divisions, it is chiefly to be considered in the two great dispensations—the one previous to the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the other—subsequent to it—and those we usually call the Old and New Testaments, but which may be more significantly termed the Old and New Dispensations—the volumes of the great and everlasting covenant.

We are now about to enter on the New Testament portion of the Bible, and this is called *New*—not because it contains anything of a contrary tendency to the *Old* Testament, but by way of distinction. The events here recorded inform the church of the fulfilment of what went before, and which was promised in the writings of the prophets; and it is properly called the *New* Testament, because the proclamation of mercy contained in it, was not so clearly made known in other ages unto the sons of men, "as it is now revealed unto us by the Spirit."

With respect to the contents of this holy volume, it will be sufficient to observe, that we have in it the gospel history, according to the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They relate all the interesting particulars of the incarnation, life, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of the great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. To these succeed the book of records, called, "The Acts of the Apostles," or the history of the church after the ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Ghost. Then follow the epistles of the several inspired writers, whose names they bear; and, lastly, the book of Revelation, which closes the sacred canon of the Scripture. All which we should "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest," as the Scriptures of truth, given by the inspiration of God; the writers were men like us—in themselves full of infirmities and sin, but they were selected by God for communicating his mind to this fallen world—and, as such, they were abundantly guided by the Spirit of truth, in the execution of the work. They did not give us their own reasonings and suppositions on religion, but they were so directed by God in the communication of his counsel, that they revealed to us truth without any mixture of error. We do not value these writings, because St. John or St. Paul wrote to us their own sentiments; but because the Lord God Almighty sent them as an inspired message to a guilty world.

We are now about to commence the gospel according to St.

Matthew. The word gospel, you will remember, signifies good news, or glad tidings; and this history of Christ's coming into the world to save sinners, is, without doubt, the best news that ever came from heaven to earth.

St. Matthew is the earliest writer of this gospel history.* He was by birth a Jew—by calling, a publican, or tax-gatherer, till Christ commanded his attendance, and then he left the receipt of custom to follow the Lord.

Let us pause here, and consider of whom we are about to read. It is of that wonderful and glorious being—the Lord Jesus Christ, that the New Testament treats; let us then be constantly on the look-out for Him who is the absorbing object—everywhere presented, and everywhere spoken of. As the design of the Old Testament was all along directed to testify of Jesus, the true Messiah—for of him, "Moses and the prophets did write," so the great purpose, we are expressly told, for which the things of the *New* were written, was "that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life through his name." †

* The date of his gospel was probably A.D. 37 or 38; but, as it was most likely written in Hebrew as well as Greek, we can easily imagine that the date assigned by Irenæus, A.D. 61, would have had great weight with the early church.

† John xx. 31.

NOTE.—If the reader wishes to pursue the subject of the "Covenants" into any thing like detail, he can peruse the learned work of Herman Witsius "The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man." Elsley in his Annotations has also some excellent extracts on this subject, at the beginning of his first volume.

THE GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO

St. MATTHEW.

CHAP. I.

THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST—HIS CONCEPTION—HIS NAMES.

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren: And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her *that had been the wife* of Urias; And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; and Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; and Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon; And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things,

behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted, is, God with us. Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son: and he called his name JESUS.

THE Gospel history opens in a very striking and peculiar manner. The Old Testament begins with the account of the creation; but the New Testament begins with the account of Him by whom all things were created. The design of the pedigree given in this chapter, is to prove that Christ was descended both from Abraham and David, from whom it was expressly promised, that the Messiah should "come according to the flesh." It was therefore necessary, in the first place, to show the fulfilment of such a promise, and this St. Matthew does, fully and satisfactorily, tracing a clear and distinct line from Abraham, and so through David, till he arrived at the birth of "Jesus, who is called Christ."* The word Christ signifies "anointed;" and includes in it his threefold office of prophet, priest, and king: hence David, when speaking of him in the spirit of prophecy, says, that he was "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." † From this significant name, all his followers are called "Christians."

We have in these verses an account of the miraculous conception and birth of the Lord Jesus. It was intimated from the beginning that the Messiah should be born of a virgin; and though, to human wisdom, this seemed impossible, yet in the fulness of God's time we find it accomplished, and his name was called Jesus. The word Jesus is the same with Joshua.‡ There were two of that name spoken of in the Old Testament, who were both illustrious types of Christ—Joshua, who was Israel's captain at their first settlement in Canaan; and another Joshua,

* The genealogy of our Lord, given by St. Matthew, differs in some respects from that found in Luke iii. 23, &c., because the former was written for the Jews, and therefore traces the pedigree of Christ from Abraham to David, and from him, through Solomon's line to Jacob, the father of Joseph, the reputed or legal father of Christ, whereas St. Luke wrote for the Gentiles, and therefore traces the pedigree upwards from Heli, the father of Mary, to David, through the line of his son, Nathan, and through him to Abraham.—See Horne's Introduction, vol. i. p. 535.

† Psalm xlv. 7.

‡ See Heb. iv. 8.

who was their high priest at their second settlement after the captivity.* Christ is our Joshua—both the "captain of our salvation," and "the high priest of our profession." The reason why he was called Jesus, is also told us—"because he shall save his people from their sins;" not merely from their guilt, but from their power—and being delivered from the bondage of corruption, the people of God know experimentally, that the name "Jesus" signifies the Saviour." This text stands in the front of the New Testament as the groundwork of the whole, and all that follows is only a further opening of it. You should, therefore, seek to understand the sacred meaning of the name Jesus, and then to enter into its full import in your own experience. Consider yourself as a guilty, helpless creature, perishing in sin, and then every word he spoke, and every miracle he wrought, will draw you to him for the salvation you want, and which he alone can bestow.

Another name is also given to the Son of God in these verses; "They shall call his name Emmanuel," the meaning of which is, "God with us"—"God manifest in the flesh,"—taking our nature into union with his own, that we might be "joined to the Lord by one spirit." The Jews had God with them in types and shadows, and dwelling between the Cherubims: but their temple is destroyed, and God has withdrawn himself. Not so with us—we still have Emmanuel—"God with us;" for though we cannot see his bodily form—we know that he has taken our nature into eternal union with his deity, and hence, as God-man, he ever liveth to make intercession for us. His people may come boldly unto the throne of grace; for he who sits there, looks upon them as "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh."

Have you thus come to Christ? Can you, from your own experience, call his name "Jesus?" Has he saved you from your sins? Nothing short of this will benefit you. If your body was afflicted with a painful disease, what would it avail you to hear that there was an infallible physician at hand, unless you sent for him to prescribe for you; and of what use could he be, unless you followed his prescriptions? Apply this to yourselves;—know that your souls are diseased by sin, and that a sovereign physician is near: his name is Emmanuel; "God with us;" he has a balm for every wound. Study his prescriptions, which are written in his holy word; believe in his name, that you may be

* Zech. iii. 1.

Christians in truth, and, having received of his Holy Spirit, you will then rejoice in the name of JESUS, because he saves his people from their sins.

NOTE.—Although Jesus is called "the first-born," we cannot thence infer that Mary had other children. Grotius has well remarked, "that the word "first" proves that no one preceded, but it does not show that another followed."

CHAP. II.

THE WISE MEN COME TO CHRIST, AND WORSHIP HIM—JOSEPH FLEETH INTO EGYPT.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem; and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child, to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in

Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene.

THE time of our Lord's birth is here stated to have been in the days of Herod the king. It had been foretold by Jacob, in the book of Genesis, "that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, till Shiloh came." *—And it is a remarkable fact that the Jews retained the distinction of tribes and a government of their own, until near the period of the birth of Jesus—they were then deprived of their own sceptre and placed under the Roman sway. The sceptre therefore had departed from them, and this circumstance alone should have shown the Jews that this was the appointed time in which Shiloh, or the Messiah, might be expected.

It was a mark of humiliation put upon the Lord Jesus, that though he was the desire of all nations, yet his birth was obscure and unregarded. The first who took notice of him, were the shepherds, to whom the vision of angels appeared. After that, Simeon and Anna† spake of him by the Spirit to all who were disposed to heed what they said. We might have expected that the men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, would now have embraced him as their long-expected Messiah; but no farther notice appears to have been taken of him, till wise men came from the east, most probably from Arabia or Persia, where many of their Magi or philosophers lived.‡ The star was not one of the heavenly bodies that appear in the sky at night, such as the fixed stars and planets, but a luminous meteor that had the appearance of a star, but which shone by day as well as by night. These Magi were evidently gentiles, and may therefore be looked on as *first fruits* of the great company of believers, who should be gathered to Christ out of all nations. The Lord caused this bright meteor to appear to these wise men, that their

* Gen. xlix. 10. † Luke ii. 26,—38.

‡ Theophylact holds that the Magi came from Persia, and that they were descendants of Balaam, whose prophecy, Numb. xxiv. 17, was now fulfilled.—Greswell has shewn that it would require four months to come from Persia to Jerusalem, and conjectures that the star appeared to the Magi both at the incarnation and the birth of Christ.—Vol. ii. p. 144 of Dissertations on the Gospel Harmony.

attention might be attracted, and then he revealed to them, that the star was intended to announce the birth of him who was to be the king of the Jews. Being thus informed, they proceeded to visit the new-born king, and came to Jerusalem: but, as it often happens, they who are nearest to the means, are farthest from the end. The Jews were ignorant of the Messiah's birth, till Herod, having called a council of the chief priests and scribes, inquired where Christ should be born. Bethlehem was soon reported as the place destined to that honour; thither the wise men bent their steps, and though the town was but seven miles distant from Jerusalem, we do not hear that a single Jew accompanied them. The star which at first appeared to them became visible again, and directed them to the house where the young child lay. How strong must their faith have been! After so long a journey they were not disappointed at finding the object of their desire with every mark of external poverty: they fell down and worshipped him, (an honour which we do not hear they observed towards Herod;) they first presented themselves, and then they offered their gifts.

The rage and jealousy of Herod are strikingly manifest; having directed the wise men to return with information, as though he would go and worship Christ himself, and being baffled in this project, though now seventy years of age, so great was his dread of a rival, that he formed the murderous plan of an infant massacre, and actually carried it into execution. But his attempts were vain. The Lord removed his Son into Egypt, where he remained till the storm had blown over, and afterwards brought him to Nazareth, in fulfilment of prophecy. Thus, instead of frustrating the designs of heaven, Herod, unwittingly, fulfilled them, occasioning by this very act, no less than three prophecies to be accomplished.* Thus it is with all who set themselves against God; they may show their malignity, but cannot counteract his designs.

We may learn much from this chapter, and especially from the conduct of the wise men of the East: they came from afar to seek Jesus—they undertook a long and expensive journey—they

* Hosea xi. 1, primarily belongs to the sons of Israel called out of Egypt, but is applied to the Son of the Most High. Jer. xxxi. 15. "A voice in Ramah," refers chiefly to the mourning captives, placed there by Nebuzaradan, but is justly applied to the massacre of the children at Bethlehem, and the parts round about.—"He shall be called a Nazarene," was not the prediction of any one prophet, but of the *prophets*, who declared that Messiah should be "despised of men," and by dwelling at Nazareth, a place ill spoken of (see John i. 46,) Jesus was called the Nazarene, or the despised one.

had dangers to encounter, and difficulties to overcome—yet they persevered to the end, and never ceased from their labours till they found him whom they sought. Thus let us not regard scoffs, or difficulties, or dangers that we may have to encounter in the way of duty; let us resolutely seek the Lord Jesus till we have found him. He is pointed out to us, not by a star, but by "the more sure word of prophecy." Let us all go on without weariness or fear, and still prosecute our inquiries after him, till we can say, "I have found him whom my soul loveth."—Whatever others may do, let us serve the Lord. If they will not go to glory with us, we must not go to hell with them. Is your desire after Christ such as is here described? Are you thus seeking him? Be assured that nothing else is so much worth your seeking. If you have found him, present to him all that you are, and all that you have. Let your body, soul, and spirit, be consecrated to him; first make a surrender of yourselves, and then let your substance be employed in his service.

CHAP. III.

THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST—HE BAPTIZETH CHRIST IN JORDAN.

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteous-

ness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

"THOSE days," which are mentioned in the first verse, signify the time whilst Jesus dwelt at Nazareth, and before he entered upon his ministry. The Scriptures are silent concerning his youth, except where they tell us that he conversed with the doctors in the temple at the age of twelve years, both hearing them and asking them questions,* neither do we hear any thing of the early life of John the Baptist: his birth had been the subject of prophecy, and St. Matthew first introduces him to our notice as preaching in the wilderness of Judea.† Officers are sent before great men to clear their way; so John, according to the tenor of prophecy, came as our Lord's forerunner "to prepare his way, and to make his paths straight."‡ He lived in the wilderness and was supported by the plainest diet, to bespeak the self-denying nature of his Master's kingdom; and thus he reminded the Jews that they ought to expect Jesus as the man of sorrows, before he came as the triumphant king.

The Baptist came preaching the doctrine of repentance. Repentance signifies a change of heart, and consequently a change of life. This preaching appears to have been wonderfully successful, insomuch that the people of Jerusalem and Judea came to be baptized of him. Amongst this multitude came many Pharisees and Sadducees, desiring to be numbered among his disciples: at this he was astonished, because the Pharisees were conceited of their own goodness, and were zealous for the traditions of the elders: the Sadducees, on the other hand, despised religion altogether, denying the existence of spirits, and a future state. But John, like a faithful minister, addressed them with all plainness, and spoke home to their consciences. What he said to them, he said to the multitude, and says also to us, for we are all concerned in it. First, he preached repentance, and practically showed what it was, by endeavouring to lay the axe of God's word at the root of sin in their hearts, that they might bring forth fruits answerable to a real change of heart. Do not imagine that repentance means only a sorrow for past sin, with

* Luke ii. 42—46.

† "The wilderness of Judea" embraced not only the mountains and some of the plains along the Jordan, but also the hill country south of Jerusalem—of which Hebron—John's native place, was the largest city. See Josephus. Wars. lib. iii. c. 35.

‡ Isaiah xl. 3.

a determination of amendment in future! It implies also that you have a new view of God in Christ, as well as of your own heart. Neither must you make your repentance a Saviour. It is to show you the vileness of sin and your need of Christ, but not to wash away sin by tears of contrition; know then that your sense of sin must lead you to Christ, whose blood can cleanse away all that is past; and know further, that repentance (which means a total change of heart) is the gift of God, for "God hath exalted Jesus as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and forgiveness of sins." *

Observe next, in John's sermon, the distinction which he makes between *his* baptism, and that of Christ. *He* could only baptize with water, but Christ was to baptize with the Holy Ghost. John's ministry was only preparatory to Christ's: as the washing of water removes the filth of the flesh, so the Holy Spirit, which was represented by the water, and which Christ bestows, removes the foul desires of the heart. Water cleanses from external defilements, and fire purges away the dross that is internally mixed with any metallic substance. Nothing can withstand the action of fire; it dissolves the hardest metals, and consumes their dross; thus the Spirit of God acts upon the hearts of men. Now the Jews were apt to found their hopes of mercy on their relation to Abraham. They had a strange conceit that no child of Abraham could perish; but John combats their error, and, in so doing, shows us also that no external advantages, however great—not even being baptized in the name of Jesus, will profit, unless we have the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit. This alone can transform, and give you a good hope of being laid up in God's garner hereafter. It is not necessary to ask in your case, as John did in those days, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"—for *you* are warned continually, even whilst reading this chapter. You have now had another message,—let conscience speak and you will not despise such solemn warnings. Consider the description here given of the wrath of God; it is, and ever will be, "wrath to come;" yes, millions and millions of years hence, it will be no nearer its end,—it will still be "wrath to come!" Why then loiter or delay in seeking the refuge which God has prepared in Jesus, to secure you from this wrath to come?

The chapter closes with an account of our Lord's baptism. He needed not baptism himself, for he had no sins to wash

* Acts v. 31.

away; but we are told his object was "to fulfil all righteousness;" to set us an example, and thus to put an honour upon the institution.

On this occasion the three persons of the ever-blessed Trinity were manifested;—God the Father, by a voice from heaven, confirming the divine mission of God the Son; and God the Holy Ghost descending upon him after the manner of a dove. This is the beloved of the Father, by whom his anger is turned away from us. He is the peace-maker, "the days-man," who can lay his hand upon us both; there is no coming to God as a Father, but through Christ as a mediator. May we embrace his offered mercy, and call him our beloved Saviour in whom we are accepted by a reconciled Father.

NOTE 1, v. 4.—There can be no doubt that ακρίδες means locusts, and not a kind of pulse, as some would have it. Some species of locusts were reckoned *clean* by the law of Moses. Lev. xi. 22. And Lightfoot shews that the Rabbis hunted after them for food. See his Notes on Mark i. 6.

NOTE 2, v. 12,—πτύον rendered "fan" is rather a shovel, (pala) by which they threw the grain against the wind to winnow it—after it has been trodden by the cattle. Lightfoot cites the following from the Talmud. "Then comes the threshing—the straw they throw into the fire—the chaff into the wind—the wheat they keep on the floor. So the nations shall be burnt, but Israel preserved." See his note on John iii. 17.

CHAP. IV.

CHRIST'S FASTING AND TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS—BEGINS TO PREACH—CALLS PETER AND ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN.

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple; And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving

Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness, saw great light: and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And Jesus, Walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy: and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, and *from* Jerusalem, and *from* Judæa, and *from* beyond Jordan.

JOHN the Baptist had said of Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease; and so it proved. As the rising sun advances, the morning star disappears; for after John had baptized Christ and borne testimony to him, we hear little of his ministry; Christ is now brought before us conspicuously, and we have in this chapter an account of his combat with the great enemy of our souls. He went forth as our champion, to meet the great Goliath, who so long defied the armies of the living God. You will observe that throughout the temptation, Satan's aim was to draw him from dependance on God. Christ having fasted forty days and forty nights, Satan first attacks him upon what he considered a weak point. He knew that he hungred greatly, and therefore he asks Christ to create a supply of bread. Here was the temptation,—his human wants craved a supply; there was no sin in desiring bread, but it would have been sinful to have wished for it, when it was the Father's will that he should fast for our sakes; * thus he was tempted, yet he never yielded to Satan's suggestion, to create bread contrary to the will of the Father. It would have implied a distrust of God, and therefore Christ refuses. Let us learn from this to wait

* Sermons on our Lord's temptations; and Appendix, by Dr. O'Brien, bishop of Ossory, and also by Dr. Manton—small volume, not included in his larger works.

God's own time to deliver us out of difficulties, be they ever so great. It is better to live poorly upon the fruits of God's goodness, than to live plentifully upon the produce of our own sin.

Satan next tempts our Lord to presumption, by asking him to throw himself from a pinnacle of the temple, and thus to put God's promise to the test, where he had said that angels should have charge over him.* But our Saviour had no warrant from God for protection, if, instead of going down the stairs of the temple, he had thrown himself headlong from the building; nor are we to expect God's special providence and protection in dangers into which we willingly and presumptuously run. If we go out of the path of duty, we forfeit the promise. Lastly, Satan makes a violent struggle, and tempts the Saviour to fall down and worship him, promising, as a reward, all the kingdoms of the world, which, it is supposed, by some optical illusion, he presented to his view: but Christ now calls him by his real name—"Satan," and drives him from him.†

Observe here the weapon which Christ used in this combat: it was "the sword of the Spirit," which St. Paul tells us, is "the word of God."‡ Satan quoted Scripture, and perverted it to meet his purpose, but he could not answer it. Let us not suppose that we are uninterested in this combat. Christ submitted to it, because he would humble himself in all things to be made like unto his brethren; he was tempted that he might overcome the tempter. Though Satan be "a strong man armed," yet we now see that the Captain of our salvation is "stronger than he." What a comfort should it be when we have a sense of our own weakness, to feel at the same time that this Almighty strength may be ours if we ask it, and to feel that we have an High Priest who knows, by experience, what it is to be tempted, and who is therefore the more tenderly "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."§

In the remainder of this chapter we read of Christ's preaching and miracles. Providence wisely ordered that John should be eclipsed, before Christ shone forth: otherwise the minds of the people would have been distracted between the Messiah and his forerunner: one would have said, "I am of John," and another, "I am of Jesus;" so when John was cast into prison, Jesus

* Psalm xci. 11.

† Which serves for our consolation, to see that the Devil does not tempt the men of God, so long as he wills, but so long as Christ suffers; and though he may suffer him to tempt for a season, in the end he drives him away because of the weakness of our nature.—*Chrysostom.*

‡ Eph. vi. 17. § Heb. iv. 15.

went forth to preach, and in fulfilment of prophecy he went to the sea coasts of Galilee." * Observe what is said of these people before Christ came to them: they were not only "in darkness," but "in the region of the shadow of death," which implies great danger. This is the state of every soul upon which Christ has not shone by his Holy Spirit. It is said, too, that they "*sat* in darkness," which signifies a *contented* posture; such a false contentment as belongs to every unconverted soul. Will you be content to remain in this state, or will you pray that Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, may shine into your heart? Christ now offers to give light to all who ask him; but he will hereafter be like a flame to consume his adversaries.

Observe the wonderful effect which the call of Christ had upon the disciples: they instantly "left all and followed him." Their conduct is recorded for your imitation. Remember the fate of those who were invited to the marriage supper, and who wished to excuse themselves. The Lord of the feast resolved that "not one of them should ever taste of his supper." † God's Spirit will not always strive with man. It has been striving long with you; God only knows how soon it may cease to strive, and give you up to the hardness of your heart, if you continue longer impenitent.

The miracles of Christ will now come under our consideration daily, and let us here observe, once for all, that these records of Christ's having relieved bodily diseases, are intended to show us spiritual things, and to set before us the method of his dealing with souls, in their conversion and sanctification. In this sense may we apply them to ourselves, and seek relief from the great Physician, for the healing of our sin-sick souls!

NOTE.—It is evident that our Lord's fasting for forty days was miraculous, therefore not to be literally imitated by us.—See Calvin's Commentary on this chapter.

CHAP. V. 1—17.

CHRIST BEGINNETH HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed *are* they

* Isaiah ix. 1, 2. † Luke xiv. 24.

which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed *are* the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed *are* the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake ; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you,* and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great *is* your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

THE last chapter concluded by telling us that a great multitude followed Christ, who, seeing their destitute condition and their manifold sorrows, was moved with compassion towards them, and healed their sick. We now find him occupied in healing the soul, by preaching the word of God on a mountain, from whence he delivered that sermon, which is called the Sermon on the Mount,—a part of which we have just read. He proposes blessedness as the object which all should have in view, and gives us the character of those who are subjects of this blessedness. Every man living is in search of happiness, and if we acknowledge Christ to be the Son of God, and therefore an infallible teacher, one would think that we should earnestly desire the blessedness he describes, and which he alone can give. The general opinion of the world, however, is, 'blessed and happy are the rich, the great, the honorable,—they that spend their days in mirth, and their years in pleasure.' But let us observe the character of those whom Christ pronounces to be blessed or happy ; they that are "poor in spirit," i. e. who are humbled for their sins, are lowly in their own eyes, and have a sense of their utter want and helplessness. They 'mourn' on account of sin, and the misery to which sin exposes them. They are "meek," —they bear all things quietly and without murmuring, and though provoked to anger, yet restrain their wrath through the gospel principle of love. Such "shall inherit the earth," i. e. they shall yet reign with Christ upon the earth.* They "hunger and thirst after righteousness,"—they hate sin, and earnestly long and desire to be made holy. They are 'merci-

* Ps. xxxvii. 10, 11. Our Lord evidently cites from this psalm and thus makes his meaning definite, as above.

ful,'—they feel for the wants and miseries of others, and, according to their ability, relieve them, from love to God. They are "pure in heart," not only outwardly moral, but inwardly holy, and though not sinless, yet their earnest desire is to be like God, and to be truly devoted to him in heart and life. They are "peace-makers," of a peaceable disposition, and from love to God, study to make peace between others. They are "sufferers" for "Christ's sake," reviled and persecuted by an ungodly world; yet under all this suffering, Christ calls upon them to "rejoice and to be exceeding glad," looking for a future inheritance.

You have thus *eight* marks which belong to those who are travelling the road to happiness; remember they must not be separated; they are all the fruits of *one* Spirit; where one exists they will all exist, and in some degree they all appear in the life of every real Christian. Now come to the point, and ask yourselves, are these marks evident in you, or are you longing to enjoy them and praying to obtain them? You are all in search of happiness, and you all, no doubt, hope to reach happiness; but if you are pursuing a different road from what is here pointed out, and still hope to be happy in the end, is not this dealing with Christ as if he were a liar? Are there two roads to glory? If not, either you, or Christ, are mistaken. Judge this point for yourselves, and while we are considering this Sermon on the Mount, read over each verse of it daily in private, and if you see any difference between your opinion and Christ's on this subject, viz. who they are that are blessed,—pray that your opinion and your will may be altered to his; and cost you what it may, intreat him to make you truly blessed,—blessed in his own way, and blessed in the end.

Towards the close of these verses Christ addresses his disciples, and says, "ye are the salt of the earth," meaning thereby, that all who are his real disciples must and will be like "salt." It is the property of salt to keep from corrupting what it is applied to; and if we have this salt—that is, his doctrine, with the power of his Spirit—it will both keep us incorrupt, and be salt in our hands to season others withal.* He says also, "ye are the light of the world," meaning, that Christians must be so; they must so live, that others may see the holiness of God shining forth in their walk and conversation,—their light will attract others to the service of their Father, and thus He will

* Col. iv. 6.

be glorified by their decision; they must keep their light always burning, and not be afraid to let it appear. What do you say to this in your hearts? are *you* this "salt?" are *you* this "light?"—think and speak the truth; but remember that if you have not the light of Christ, you are in the darkness of an unconverted state: if you have not the salt of his grace, you are good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot.

CHAP. V. 17—32.

CHRIST EXPOUNDS THE LAW—SIXTH AND SEVENTH COMMANDMENTS.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, but whosoever shall do and teach *them,* the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar; and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery.

THE persons whom Christ here addressed, were such as looked to the Scriptures of the Old Testament as their rule, and therein

Christ commended them; but they depended also on the false comments of the Scribes and Pharisees, as their guide: and in this he blamed them. With respect to the law, Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil it. The Saviour of souls is the destroyer of nothing but the works of the devil.* He fulfilled the law, by shewing that he brought in no new and strange religion, but only gave a brighter view of those doctrines which they had been taught by Moses and the prophets. He also fulfilled it by obeying the commands of it, by making good the promises of it, and by answering to the types of it. He asserts the truth and perpetuity of the law, by telling us, that heaven and earth shall rather be wrapt in ruin and confusion, than one jot or tittle of God's word fall to the ground, or be uttered in vain. Think of this, ye careless ones, who daily read the threatenings of God against impenitent sinners; read here your doom, if you continue to reject the Saviour. Our Lord next informs his hearers, that their righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Now these persons were looked upon as having arrived at the highest pitch of perfection; they scrupulously observed the letter of the law; but their error was, that they were proud of what they did, and trusted to it as their righteousness. After we have done all in our power, let us acknowledge ourselves to be "unprofitable servants;" and let us pray that we may have such a view of the strictness of the law, that we may cleave to the obedience of Christ *alone* as our title to glory, and enjoy that conformity to Christ's image, which makes us meet for the world of holiness; thus shall our righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Our Lord next notices a fatal error into which the Pharisees fell, and into which many amongst us fall—that of looking to the mere *letter* of the law, without considering its *spirituality*. For instance, if you were asked whether you ever broke the sixth commandment, you might assert—that you never committed murder. But our Lord here tells us, that malice, hatred, revenge, and rash anger, are the *seeds* of murder, because if not checked, they would lead to the most violent action; hence St. John tells us, "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." † Can you now plead innocence, when charged with the breach of this commandment? Many too who think they have never broken the seventh commandment, must yet plead guilty, when they find that it not only forbids gross sin, but extends to every

* 1 John iii. 8. † 1 John iii. 15.

impure thought and unchaste look. By adverting to these two commandments, Christ would have you know what meaning he puts upon them all. It is to the *heart* that God looks; he does not want to hear you speak, to know what you are; judge yourself in like manner with respect to the other commandments; look not merely to the *letter* of the law, nor consider yourself innocent because free from a gross violation of it, but remember that God looks to its spiritual meaning, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart, and that, in his sight, a man is guilty who *meditated* an evil action, though he may never have put it into execution.

Our Lord having thus explained the sixth commandment, inculcates the duty contained in it. We must not only abstain from anger or revenge, but we must indulge a spirit of love, so as to seek reconciliation with an offended brother. The advice which Christ gives on this occasion, aptly suits our case with respect to God. We have all offended him times without number, yet he has sent his only-begotten Son to make an atonement for our sin, and to bring us into a state of reconciliation: our duty is to embrace the offer without delay: "We are yet in the way with him." Though we are hastening every moment to the judgment-seat of Christ, we have not yet arrived there, and there is yet time for acceptance: God is our adversary on account of our sins, and now, while we are on the way to judgment, he offers pardon through Jesus; but if once the matter is brought before the judge, all hope of mercy and pardon will be past. Consider the solemnity with which our Lord warns us against delay, and lose not another moment in securing the intercession of Jesus.

Many of these precepts are so strict, that you may be inclined to say, "It is a hard saying—who can hear it." The mortification of sin is allowed to be hard, like the pulling out an eye, or the cutting off a hand; but still it must be done. We are surrounded with objects which are incitements to sin. Beauty has a tendency to create unhallowed desire; splendor, to call forth envy and ambition; and plenty, to lead to intemperance; but our Lord sets before us an alternative; either to turn away from all occasion of sin, or to suffer the displeasure of an angry God in hell. The pleasure of sin will surely be too dearly purchased at such a price as this, and the pain of mortifying sin can never be compared with that which will follow from the indulgence of it. If a diseased limb threatened your life, you would not only suffer the pain of having it cut off, but pay a person for the

operation. Be equally wise in respect to your souls; doubt your own strength as much as you please, and the more you do so, the better; but never give up the task till you have made a trial of Christ's strength, which he has promised to make perfect in your weakness.

NOTE.—*Raca*, in verse 22, means *vain fellow*, a word of contempt. *Fool*, means wretch, or miscreant; a term of the greatest abhorrence. These imply greater anger than the first expression,—"without a cause," or rashly. Hence three degrees of punishment are set forth by the three modes of Jewish punishment, viz., the *judgment*, the lowest court,—the *council* or sanhedrin, who punished more severely,—and the *Gehenna* or Valley of Hinnom, where children were sacrificed to Moloch, and people were tortured; an emblem of hell-fire. The idea is, that aggravated sin deserves increased punishment.

CHAP. V. 33—48.

SERMON CONTINUED—ON SWEARING IN ORDINARY AFFAIRS—ON REVENGE—ON THE LOVE OF OUR ENEMIES.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black: But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man shall sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others?* do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

IN continuing our meditation on our Lord's sermon on the Mount, we now find him combating the false opinions of the Jews on the subject of swearing. They thought that if a person kept his oath, his swearing in ordinary affairs was of no consequence; but our Lord says "Swear not at all." The Jews,

having a reverence for the name of Jehovah, invented what they considered an inferior kind of oath, and swore "by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by their own heads." In the same way we hear many swear, by their life, their faith, their soul; but our Lord shows that to swear by the creature, is in fact to swear by the Creator himself, since every creature is his, and subsists by his providence—hence every kind of oath in our intercourse with men is unlawful, except in the solemn administration of justice between man and man. Our Lord's words are indeed so emphatic that many have thought that even an oath in a court of justice is contrary to these precepts; but this is a mistake—for the prohibition plainly applies to our "communications" one with another—our "conversation" with men in the usual affairs of life. God himself is said to give us not only his promise, but his *oath*, in imitation of man's transactions in law.* And the angel is said to have sworn by him that liveth for ever and ever; †—examples which clearly prove that our Lord's words are directed against profane and causeless swearing. What a miserable habit is this—how offensive to God, and how useless in begetting confidence! If our character for truth does not gain credit for our *word*, men will be slow to take our *oath*.

When people are reproved for swearing, they often urge passion as an excuse; but this is to offer one sin as an excuse for another: or they will account it a sufficient excuse to say, 'I did not think of it;' but what excuse is that? it says, in fact—'I have no reverence for God.' Well would it be if they who curse and swear, and they also who occasionally use the words 'God bless me,' 'Lord have mercy,' and 'God knows,' &c. were sensible of the guilt which they contract.

The next error which our Lord considered was that of revenge. 'Tis true the law allowed magistrates to inflict punishment upon offenders, and even expressed the words, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,"—meaning thereby that wherein any had offended, they should make restitution to the extent of the injury done; but the Pharisees gave this power into the hands of individuals, to avenge their own private wrongs, which the Lord never intended should be done; on the contrary, we find here a lesson of forbearance and forgiveness inculcated. We are not to take Christ's expressions in their literal sense, when he desires us to part with a second garment, or to offer our cheek to those who smite us; but the general

* Heb. vi. 16, 17. † Rev. x. 6.

meaning is, that we should rather be inclined to suffer a greater loss, and submit to bear it, for peace' sake, than to stand upon the rigour of justice. Thus shall we overcome evil with good. Connected with this spirit of forgiveness is that universal love spoken of in the last verses of this chapter. Even wicked persons generally love their friends—nature inclines them to it, and self-interest directs it; but if this be your rule, in what respect are you better than the publicans and sinners? and if you are no better than they, in your disposition and conduct, how can you hope for a better destiny than theirs? Think of the golden precept inculcated by our blessed Lord, "Love your enemies;" and think, at the same time, how far removed from this rule, are all those quarrellings and jealousies, that passion and resentment, that anger and tale-bearing, which are so frequent among us. If we feel that the precept "love your enemies," is difficult to perform at all times—especially when greatly provoked by unjust dealings or ungrateful returns of evil for good, let us fix our eye on the lovely example of Jesus, who loved his enemies—prayed for them, and even died for them, and let us pray for grace to follow his meekness and forbearance—so shall we prove ourselves to be his true and faithful disciples.

NOTE on v. 41.—ἀγγαρεύειν, to send off an ἀγγάρος a public courier. This word is of Persian origin, and was afterwards received into the Greek. The ἀγγάροι, or couriers had the power of *compelling* any one to lend their horse in the king's service.—See Robinson's Lexicon.

CHAP. VI. 1.—18.

SERMON CONTINUED—ALMSGIVING—PRAYER—THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are:* for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do:* for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye there-

fore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name: Thy kingdom come: thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven: Give us this day our daily bread: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

In this portion of our Lord's sermon, he sets himself to correct one evil very prevalent among the Pharisees, viz. hypocrisy, and he notices three ways in which it appeared; in alms-giving —in prayer—and in fasting. We are called to serve God with our *souls*, our *bodies*, and our *property:* the first must be done by *prayer*, the second by *fasting*, and the third by *alms;* but in each of these points the Pharisees acted under the influence of pride and hypocrisy. The principal feature in their character was ostentation, "they did all their works to be seen of men." In distributing alms they sought to draw the attention and admiration of the public; but against such conduct our Lord warns both them and us. The giving of alms, like every thing else, must be judged of by the *motive* from whence it springs, and it is then only to be deemed piety and charity, when it springs from love to God, and not from a desire of man's praise.*

On the subject of prayer, likewise, the Pharisees pretended to have so much reverence for God, that they would not defer their accustomed acts of devotion, even for a few minutes: but, if the usual hour arrived, would perform them in the corner of a street, or in any other place, however conspicuous; whilst, in reality, the whole was a contrivance to attract notice, and obtain a high reputation for sanctity: such must not be the conduct of the Christian. He will, no doubt, join both in social and public worship; but when he seeks God for his own soul's good, he desires to be alone with God, and thus to enjoy secret fellowship with him, whose ears are always open to our petitions. Oh!

* "How great strength the love of human approbation has, none feels, but he who has proclaimed war against it. For though it be easy for any not to wish for praise when it is denied him, it is difficult not to be pleased with it when it is offered."—*Augustine.*

that we knew more of this blessed privilege— we should then feel the efficacy of earnest, faithful pleading in our whole state of mind and character. Prayer is the very breath of a regenerate soul; it is the service of the heart, and not merely of the lip and knee. The true point to be ascertained is, do the feelings and desires of your soul correspond with the expressions of your lips? If they do, and if they are offered through Jesus, they will constitute acceptable prayer;—if not, they are altogether worthless in the sight of God.

The duty of *fasting* was also perverted by the Pharisees, to feed their pride. In order to appear outwardly penitent, they disfigured their faces, omitted to cleanse themselves, and put on melancholy dejected looks. Our Lord does not here condemn fasting, but censures those who make an exhibition of it. Fasting evidently means abstinence from food,—it has been observed by the most devoted servants of God in all ages of the Church, as a help to devotion and a means of mortifying the flesh. We have here three points for self-examination. Let us "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." The stones over which they stumbled, are set up as way-marks to guide us: let us pray for such a disposition of mind, that God's glory may be the mainspring of all our actions.

In the latter verses just read, we have that form of prayer which our Lord gave for the use of his followers; it is also meant as a *pattern* of what our prayers should be, as we may gather from the mode in which our Lord here introduces it—"After this manner therefore pray ye;" whereas in St. Luke he enjoins it as a positive *form* —"when ye pray *say*—Our Father which art in Heaven," &c.* It contains several distinct petitions;—some for the advancement of God's honour, and some for the promotion of our happiness. First, we pray that the name of God may be hallowed, or adored; secondly, that his kingdom of glory may come, when his will shall be done by men on earth, as by angels in heaven. For ourselves, we pray first—for daily bread—which God has promised to supply us with, both for soul and body. Secondly, we ask for the pardon of our sins, as God has taught us to forgive our brethren their trespasses; and, thirdly, we pray for deliverance from temptation. Everything around is employed by Satan to tempt us; and is it not mocking God, if we use this petition, and then wilfully and knowingly rush into scenes of temptation, which we know must

* Luke xi. 2.

endanger our souls? This prayer ends with ascribing glory to God, and pleading his power to enforce our petitions. We all daily use this prayer; but, alas! how frequently does it dwindle into a mere form. Study and examine each portion of it, and try, for the future, that your heart may go along with the expressions of your lips, when you use it. After concluding this prayer, our Lord further notices one part of it,—that of forgiveness of injuries. In vain do we use the words "forgive us our trespasses," if we harbour any revenge against an offending brother: such a spirit would doubtless prove that we were ignorant of our sins against God; for how could we take vengeance on an offending brother for a trifling fault, if we were sensible what a large debt we ourselves owe to God? Let us lay these things to heart, and as we hope to be forgiven, let us pray for that spirit of Christian forbearance, which will enable us to overlook the faults, and pardon the offences, of all who may injure us.

NOTE.—It has been much disputed whether the Doxology with which the Lord's prayer closes is genuine, but Whitby has satisfactorily shewn that although omitted in the Vulgate and some of the Latin Fathers, it is to be received as part of the sacred text.

CHAP. VI. 19—34.

WHERE OUR TREASURE IS TO BE LAID UP—WE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON—NOT TO BE ANXIOUS ABOUT WORLDLY THINGS.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light: But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field,

which to-day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

THE Lord, who knows the heart of man, directed his exhortation to the very points, where we are most likely to be tempted and overcome. The tendency of our fallen nature is to make this world our rest, and to regard our possessions in it, be they more or less, as our treasure;—hence Christ warns us against having our treasure upon earth. He does not forbid diligence in needful business, for honest industry is recommended by God himself; but he forbids us to regard earthly things as the source of our happiness, and recommends us to be diligent in storing up treasure in heaven; in doing so, we may learn a lesson from those persons who go to a foreign country for the purpose of acquiring wealth; they go thither for one fixed purpose, which they follow, uniformly, during their continuance there; they never for a moment forget that they are labouring with a view to their future ease and comfort, when they return home. We should copy their diligence, and we should pass through this life with a view to a future state, remembering that there is a place of glory to gain, and a Hell to avoid, and we should account every day lost, which does not impress on us the emptiness of earthly things, and the glory—the real glory of the kingdom to come. Alas! that we should fix our affections on things which the moth may consume, or the hand of the thief plunder—a poor inheritance this for an immortal soul—whereas, when we look at the property which our heavenly Father provides for us, we find it to be "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away;" and it is only the corrupt state of our hearts which prevents our asking and obtaining it. This truth our Lord thus explains. If the bodily eye be clear and perfect, we perceive objects as they are, and walk on steadily; but if our eye be defective or diseased, we can neither see, nor walk, aright. In like manner, if our hearts remain in their naturally diseased state, we shall lose our way; but if they be renewed by divine grace, we shall have, what in Scripture is called, the "single eye," *i. e.* our spiritual sense and judgment will be good; our understanding will be enlightened by the

Holy Spirit to discern spiritual things, and to follow after righteousness.

Our Lord next shows us the impossibility of uniting the service of the world with that of God. A man may do some service for two masters, but he cannot *devote* himself to the service of more than one; "Ye cannot *serve* God and mammon."* God requires the *whole* man, and will not share the heart with the world: he is "a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another," and he requires his people to worship him with *all* their heart, with *all* their mind, with *all* their soul, and with *all* their strength. Keep in view, that whatever has your heart, is your God, and if you will consider this, you will find that (God not being uppermost in your heart) you are guilty of idolatry much oftener than you imagine.

Observe what multiplied arguments our Lord uses to free us from anxious carefulness. A thoughtfulness about the future is by no means improper; there is a care and foresight which Christian prudence requires. This much is lawful; but what can we obtain by anxious cares? We cannot add one inch to our height, or a moment to our age. Let us only look around us, and see what God is doing in the animal and vegetable world; how he feeds the birds of the air, which make no provision for themselves, and clothes with unrivalled beauty the flowers of the field, which have so short a continuance, "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these lilies"—they far exceed in beauty all the fine purple and gay clothing in the world—they seem to join the fowls of the air in rebuking our anxiety about the poor body. Why should its feeding and clothing occupy men's thoughts as they do, whilst God is clothing the fields with verdure, and filling all things with plenteousness? Can we conceive that God will take less care of *us*, who are so much higher in the scale of being? Let us then "seek *first* the kingdom of God:" let the first of our talents, and the first of every thing we have, be devoted to his service; let the first desire of our souls be, to have his kingdom of grace set up in our hearts, and, if this be effected, we need not fear for the future—all other things shall be added unto us.

* Mammon is a Syriac word, signifying *riches*—it may be taken for all earthly possessions. Our Lord personifies it, and sets it forth as a master who rivals the true God in men's hearts.

CHAP. VII. 1—14.

CHRIST REPROVES RASH JUDGMENT—EXHORTS TO PRAYER—THE BROAD AND NARROW WAY.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye: and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

In the first verses of this chapter our Lord directs us how to conduct ourselves, in reference to the faults of others, and his expressions are intended as a reproof to those who are rigid and severe in condemning all about them, while their own conduct stands in need of reformation. Christ's words do not forbid the exercise of magisterial judgment, for magistracy is of God's appointment; nor do they forbid our forming a discreet judgment, whether of things, or persons, for the regulation of our own conduct; for in this very chapter, he desires us to judge men "by their fruits;"* but his words forbid a needless, unfounded, hasty, or severe judgment, and thereby he instructs us that we should judge of every person as favourably as we can, and not put a bad construction on doubtful actions; that we should, as far as possible, lean to the charitable side, and even where necessity compels us to condemn the conduct of any person, we should still cast a veil of love over his transgressions, and hide them as far as justice will allow.

* Verse 20.

Our Lord refers to two kinds of enemies to the gospel under the names of dogs and swine: to them we are not to cast the pearls of the gospel, lest they despise it and turn to rend us. The gospel is indeed to be preached to *every* creature—to open sinners, as well as to moral men, but these terms do not refer to men in their fallen state only, but to such as by sure tokens, do declare their *obstinate* contempt of God, whereby the disease may appear incurable.* There is a time for all things: there is a time to speak, and a time to be silent; let us pray for wisdom in speaking on the solemn subject of religion.

In the former chapter our Lord had spoken of prayer as a commanded duty—here he speaks of it as the appointed means of obtaining what we need. The words "ask," "seek," "knock," certainly imply a *solicitude* about some object. "Ask"—as a beggar asks alms; "Seek"—as for a thing of value that you have lost; "Knock"—as he that desires to enter the house, knocks at the door.

"Asking" only, is not prayer, unless you "seek" for the things in God's appointed way; nor is seeking sufficient, if you do not, like persons anxious to obtain an answer, continue "knocking" at the door of mercy. Now consider the promises which are annexed to these commands—"Ask and it *shall* be be given you," not *lent*, nor *sold* to you, but "given you:" "Seek, and ye shall find." God is found of those that seek him: "Knock and it *shall* be opened to you," the door of mercy and grace shall no longer be shut against you as enemies, but open to you as friends and children: and, lest you might still be discouraged, our Lord makes an appeal to your feelings: "What man is there of you," "whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" whence he infers, If ye then, being evil, grant your children's request, much more will your heavenly Father give you the good things you ask. Here then is encouragement for you. God may not immediately answer you; and it may be, that he will not grant the precise thing which you pray for; but if the salvation of your soul be the subject of your prayer, he will answer in the best *time*, and in the best *manner*, granting that which eventually will be most conducive to his own glory and your good.

The two last verses which were read, deserve serious attention; they state the important truth, that there are but two roads set before us, the road to glory, and the road to endless

* Marlorate on St. Matthew, p. 138.

woe. Let us consider what is said of the broad road—"the gate is wide:" you may go in with all your lusts—you will have abundance of company in that way—it is the way of worldly pleasure, and every one will tell you to eat, drink, and be merry; but consider "*it leads to destruction!*" It is natural for us to go down the stream, and to do as others do; but if we follow the crowd, it must be to do evil, for *many* travel in this broad road; but it is too great a compliment to be willing to be lost for company's sake, and to go to misery with them, because they will not go to glory with us. Now, consider the *narrow way:* it is difficult, no doubt; the gate is small, the path is thorny, and there are few travellers; but, notwithstanding all this, there are joys in it which none but those who have travelled it, can know; and, oh! consider the *end* of it—"it leads to life"—life eternal. Deliberate no longer; "enter in at the strait gate," knock at it by sincere prayer, and it shall be opened, and you will soon find that, though rough and thorny, it has its pleasures too, and that THE END OF IT IS PEACE.

CHAP. VII. 15—29.

TO BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS—NOT TO BE HEARERS ONLY, BUT DOERS OF THE WORD—LIKE HOUSES BUILDED ON A ROCK, NOT ON THE SAND.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.

It is evident that Christ intended to counteract the influence of the Pharisees. Though they were in high repute for sanctity, and though they pretended to have a high regard for religion, yet they were in fact the bitterest enemies of all vital godliness. Our Lord therefore gave his followers a rule whereby to judge of true and false teachers. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Error and sin go hand in hand, so likewise truth and holiness. We need not be surprised at false teachers arising in every age of the Church. Christ has warned us of the wiles of Satan, who often comes as an angel of light, but we must bring all teachers to the test here given. What fruit follows from their teaching? Do they *practise* in their lives, those things which they *preach?*

This rule is also applicable to us all, and will serve as our guide, in discovering who are, and who are not, the true people of God. We are to judge of men by their works, as a tree is known by its fruit. No care or culture can make a tree produce any other fruit than that of its own kind. We are to be judged, not by particular acts, but by the whole course and tenor of our conversation. Now Christ has shown us that by nature we are evil, and consequently must bring forth bad fruit. How then must we obtain a change of nature, so as to bring forth good fruit? Your heart, in a natural state, is like a barren tree, and in order to bring forth good fruit, acceptable to God, the old propensities must be subdued, and you must have the divine nature grafted upon your heart: this must be effected by the operation of the Spirit of God, and your fruit will then be good. This is what is meant when the Scripture speaks of your being "born again," of your being made "new creatures," &c. and lest you should be deceived upon this point, God has given you (in the 5th chap. to the Galatians) a description of the fruit which grows upon the old, unconverted heart,* and adds, that "they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God," or in other words, they shall be cut down and burned; and in the same chapter, God shows you what is the fruit of the divine nature ingrafted upon the heart by his Spirit.† Read these verses, and examine yourselves by them, and bear in mind, that until your hearts are changed, you cannot enter into his joyful presence.

Christ next shows that an outward profession of religion, however remarkable, will not avail, without a corresponding

* Gal. v. 19—21. † Ibid. 22, 23.

conduct. It is not enough to call him "Lord, Lord," if we do not his will, and this is the will of God, even our sanctification. It is possible for you even to prophesy, and still not belong to Christ: for Balaam and Caiaphas uttered prophecies, yet that did not save them: you might even cast out devils, as Judas did, and after all, no more be saved than he was. Nothing then will avail but having Christ's spirit ingrafted upon your hearts, which will make you bring forth fruit to the glory of his name. How terrible the doom of the false professor, when Christ shall disown him in the day of judgment. "I never knew you (or approved of you), *depart* from me, ye that work iniquity;" how much will the pleasures of sin, of worldly splendour, of a transient reputation, cost those who forget God! What can the whole world avail us, if we are finally driven away from the joyful presence of Christ!

In concluding this long and instructive sermon, our Lord divided his hearers into two classes: those who heard his sayings, and did them—and those who heard, and did them not. The state of their respective cases is represented under the comparison of two builders; one was "wise and built on a rock," and his building stood in a storm; the other was "foolish, and built upon the sand," and his building fell. Remember that there is a rock provided for you to build upon, "and THAT ROCK IS CHRIST;" He is offered as a foundation, and "other foundation can no man lay." Build upon that rock alone, and your house shall stand, though storm and tempest beat upon it. But alas! many profess that they hope to be saved, yet despise this rock, and build their house upon "the sand;" they build upon an external profession of religion; they repeat their prayers, are harmless to their neighbours, and hope that God is merciful: such is the foundation of their house, but it is all *sand*. There is a storm coming that will try what your hopes are built on—and if they are built upon a sandy foundation, your house will fall, and that, when you have no time to build another; *now*, when you have time to build, look out for a good foundation stone; remember that ALL BUT CHRIST, IS SAND: build your hopes on him alone; then shall your building prosper, and at last the top-stone shall be laid with joy unspeakable.

NOTE.—Trapp in his Commentary on verses 24 and 25, has some excellent and terse remarks on the vanity and danger of insincere profession of Christ's name.

CHAP. VIII. 1—22.

CHRIST CLEANSETH A LEPER—HEALETH THE CENTURION'S SERVANT AND OTHERS.

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*. When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, *so* be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them. When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

St. Matthew having, in the foregoing chapters, given us a specimen of our Lord's preaching, proceeds now to give some instances of the miracles he wrought, which proved him to be a teacher sent from God, and the great healer of this diseased world. The first miracle recorded by this evangelist, was his curing a leper. We read much of the plague of leprosy in the

books of Moses. It was a loathsome disorder which covered the body with white festered spots, and by degrees eat away the flesh; it was generally inflicted by the immediate hand of God; it excluded the person who was afflicted with it from public ordinances,* and from most of the employments and comforts of society; and, what was worse than all, it could not be cured by human means. But Jesus was more than man. The poor leper came to him with humble faith, hoping for a cure, and his expectations were answered. The touch of a leprous person would have made any one else unclean, but Jesus could not contract defilement: he therefore, touched him, and an immediate cure was effected.†

Next comes a centurion, a Roman officer, to plead in behalf of his servant, who was afflicted with the palsy. This was a disease in which the physician's skill usually failed; but the centurion's faith was strong, for upon Christ's offering to go to his house, he not only expressed his unworthiness of such an honour, but declared his belief, that if Christ only spoke the word where he was, his servant would be healed. He then illustrated the power of Christ's word, by a reference to his own position: as a centurion, he had authority over his soldiers. They were all at his command; so that he could, by them, execute his pleasure at a distance. Thus, he implied, Christ could speak, and it would be done. The centurion had this command over his soldiers, though he was himself "a man under authority"—not a commander-in-chief, but an inferior officer: much more then had Christ this power, who was the supreme Lord of all. This expression of a strong faith, drew forth the Saviour's commendation, and the centurion was comforted with this reply, "as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." He *did* believe, and, therefore his servant was healed.

Another effect of our Saviour's miraculous power is here recorded, viz. his curing Peter's wife's mother of a fever. He spoke the word, and the fever left her. They that recover from fevers by natural means, are generally weak, and feeble, for a long time after; but Christ cured by a power beyond that of nature, and we find that the woman was immediately able to follow her usual occupations.

But for what purpose are these miracles recorded? Were they

* See Lev. xiii. 44, 46.

† "For a testimony unto them" (v. 4.) εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς. Trench shews that this ought to be rendered "for a testimony against them, i. e. against their unbelief."—See his notes on the Miracles, p. 220.

only intended to amuse us as stories? No, they have a higher object in view. The Saviour's great aim in all his miracles, was to turn our eyes to HIM as the physician of the soul; to convince us of our need of healing, and of his power and willingness to help us to the uttermost.* In proportion to the feeling you have of your own plague, will you turn to him in faith. If you feel your burden, you will long to be eased of it. If you know your own sore, you can lay your hand upon it, and tell him of it, and upon the warrant of every miracle you read of, you may call upon him for relief. But if you will not acknowledge your sin—if you make light of it, or think all is well with you, because, perhaps, you are not a gross offender, how can you come to him for healing? what can you say to him—what have you to do with him? Search and examine yourself; go to the great physician of souls in faith—consult him frequently—apply to him in earnest prayer; let your first petition be, 'Lord, shew me the real state of my heart,' and then offer up another—'give me saving faith in thine atonement.'

It frequently happens that circumstances are related in Scripture, which, at first sight, appear of no importance, but which, upon closer inspection, are found to contain important instruction. Of this nature are the two conversations recorded in this portion of Scripture; they serve to put us on our guard against two destructive errors, viz.:—hastiness in promising, and slowness in performing. One of the two persons who came to converse with our Lord, was a Scribe, or teacher of the law; he professed a great regard for Christ, and a readiness to follow him; but our Lord's answer shows that his intentions were not good, —that he probably expected worldly advantage by following him, and *this* he was not likely to get. His followers could not expect to fare better than their master; and even Christ, though Lord of all, had not so sure a covering as the beasts of the field, or the birds of the air. Let us learn from this that a mere external profession of waiting upon Christ will profit us nothing.

The other character who conversed with our Lord, was already a disciple; but our Lord wished him to be in closer attendance upon him; to this he objected, and asked leave first to go and bury his father. Our Lord replied, that the office which he pleaded as an excuse, might as well be performed by others, who, being destitute of spiritual life, were unfit for the high duty he was called to; "Let the dead bury their dead, but go

* See John ix. 4, 5.

thou, and preach the kingdom of God." How many resemble this man! Each one imagines he has some present engagement of great importance, and when called to follow Christ, says, 'Let me first go, and finish this or that business—let me first get out of my present situation, and *then* I will become religious.' He promises himself a more convenient season; but, alas! he delays till death cuts short his purposes, and puts an end to his existence. But where shall the soul be found? Take heed then of all such delays. Give Christ your first and best attention—follow the Lord fully, and you will then be able to give all things their proper place.

NOTE.—In v. 17 we have a citation from Is. liii. 4, which does not precisely agree either with the Hebrew or Septuagint. It is here applied to bodily sickness, perhaps to shew the connection between sin and sorrow, and how Christ in bearing the former, endured all our woes.

CHAP. VIII. 23—34.

CHRIST STILLETH THE TEMPEST—DRIVETH THE DEVILS OUT OF TWO MEN POSSESSED—AND SUFFERETH THEM TO GO INTO THE SWINE.

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but he was asleep. And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea: and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! And when he was come to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go, And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought *him* that he would depart out of their coasts.

WHILE Jesus was on his passage to the other side of the lake of Gennesareth, a violent storm overtook the vessel: so soon did he

give a proof of what he just now said, that they who follow him must reckon upon difficulties. The disciples, being afraid, called out to him while he lay asleep, and after chiding their want of faith, he rebuked the wind, "and there was a great calm." No wonder that all in the ship should be astonished at the power of Christ, and exclaim, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" He thus gave a proof of his divine power, which makes "the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*" And can we doubt his power and willingness to help us in the deepest waters of affliction, or in the severest storms of temptation? Storms and tempests will certainly overtake every child of God; but when doubts and fears run mountains high, they may call to mind this passage of Scripture; they should follow the example of the disciples, and go to Jesus, saying, "Lord save us, we perish," and he who rebuked the wind and waves, shall restore peace, and calm their troubled souls.

Our Lord's object in crossing the lake, appears from the miracle which he performed immediately on landing: "There met him two possessed with devils." It is an instance of the power of God over the devils, that although they studied to hurt these poor creatures, yet they could not keep them from meeting Jesus. These devils addressed Christ as Jesus the Son of God. This was a true saying; but it shows us that even the devils know, and believe, and confess Christ to be the Son of God, and yet they are devils still. Think here upon the word you lately read: "Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." But, notwithstanding this confession, they renounced his authority, saying, "what have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" they knew that the incarnate Son of God would soon cast them into the depths of hell, and not always permit them "to go about like the roaring lion, seeking whom they may devour." Yet they hated Christ, and wished to have no part with him. Oh! the depth of hellish malice—how has it been infused into fallen man? how many even now say to Jesus—in heart, if not in words, "What have we to do with thee?"

Observe what a pleasure it is to them to do mischief. When expelled from the men, they asked permission to enter the swine: they would do harm to the beasts of the field, where they could now no longer torment the men; besides, they doubtless

* Psalm cvii. 29.

aimed at setting the Gadarenes against Christ: they knew how men cling to earthly property, and prefer even the swine of this world to the adorable Saviour. They were permitted to succeed in their design—the herd was lost, and the people were set against Christ. If it be a mystery to us that Satan should so often succeed in tempting men, it should make us more watchful against his snares, and more thankful for being kept from his wiles.

Two reasons may be suggested for our Lord's granting this permission: First, to convince the Sadducees who were present, that there *were* such things as spirits, which they denied; and secondly, to punish the Gadarenes, who, though Jews, either ate swine themselves, contrary to the Jewish law, or fed them for their neighbours. At the sight of this miracle the owners of the swine fled;—but alas! from whom did they flee?—from him who alone could save them from the power of the devil. They spread abroad the news, so that the whole city came out to meet Jesus; but instead of inviting him, they desired him to depart out of their coasts. They who will not suffer Christ to have a place in their hearts, because it would be the death of their evil lusts, do, in fact say to the Almighty, "depart from us—we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

NOTE.—In v. 28, the people are called "Gergesenes;" but "Gadarenes" is the more ancient reading, as in Mark v. 1, and Luke viii. 26. Gadara was according to Josephus, eight miles from Tiberias, at the south-east end of the lake.

CHAP. IX. 1—17.

CHRIST HEALETH THE PALSY—CALLETH MATTHEW—REFERS TO FASTING.

And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This *man* blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee; or to say Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw *it*, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came

and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard *that*, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth upon an old garment: for that which is put in to fill up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

You may remember at the end of the last chapter, that the Gadarenes were so vexed at the loss of their swine, that they begged Christ would depart from them. Unhappily for them he took them at their word, nor do we hear that he ever came into their coasts again. In righteous judgment Christ forsakes those places and persons that are weary of him, but abides with those that desire his stay. The first occurrence after his return to Capernaum, (for that was called "his own city," because he resided there,) was the cure of a man sick of the palsy. His distemper was such that he could not come to Christ himself,—his friends therefore carried him to the house, where Christ was—and when they could not get near him on account of the crowd, they let him down over the roof into the open area, where Jesus stood.* Here is an instance of *their* faith; and upon seeing it, our Lord said to him, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." From this we learn the great value of faith—This it is which applies to Christ—this receives Christ's salvation as set forth in the word and makes the benefit ours; "By grace we are saved through faith." What can lead any of us to Christ, but the knowledge of that sin which is the plague we are afflicted with? God be praised, we have a remedy at hand; Jesus,—a blessed name for sinners; and the miracle we have just read of, may give you sufficient warrant to go to him, if you feel your disease, and desire a cure. On healing the sick man, our Lord said, "thy sins be forgiven thee:" this shows us that sin is the cause of all our sickness, nor was there any disease in the world, until sin had made its appearance.

St. Matthew gives an account of the manner in which he was

* See Mark ii. 2—4.

first led to follow Christ. He had been a publican, or tax-gatherer, and was sitting at the receipt of custom, or the place where the taxes were paid—his hands full of business, and his head full of calculations, when Jesus passed by, and desired him to follow him. He immediately obeyed the call; he did not ask time to finish his business—he left all, and followed him. May the Lord in his mercy with like power speak his word to our souls, that we may arise and follow him in newness of life, and bid farewell to all such love of the world as would keep us from him. Matthew being grateful for the favor Jesus had bestowed upon him, made a feast for him, and, as will ever be the case with all faithful followers of Christ, he was anxious that his friends should also benefit by his company; he therefore invited many of the publicans—his late associates, to meet him. But the self-righteous Pharisees were displeased at our Lord's condescension, and turned it into a ground of accusation against him, for keeping company with, what they considered, a degraded race of men. This drew forth from our Lord those memorable words which you will do well to consider—"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Sin, then, you will perceive, in the judgment of our Lord, is sickness, and a deadly one too, if it be not removed; as no person would think of employing a physician if he was not sensible of sickness; so in like manner, they who do not think themselves sinful, will never apply to Jesus, the great physician of souls. He does not mean that there were any persons truly righteous who needed him not, but with such as *fancied themselves righteous*, and boasted of their goodness, he had nothing whatever to do. Have you ever *felt* your sickness? Have you ever gone to that physician to be cured? Have you looked by faith to the Lord Jesus for pardon? If not, your case is dangerous, and dying in that state you have nothing to expect but a fearful looking-for of judgment.

Our Lord is next called on to explain why his disciples fasted not, while the disciples of John and of the Pharisees strictly observed that duty. He answers the question by shewing that with them it was not a proper season for that duty. The disciples of Christ were the children of the bride-chamber, and while He, the bridegroom was with them, all sadness should be kept at a distance. He would soon leave them, and then they would mourn. To explain this further, he refers to some rules of prudence among men, with whom it was not usual to sew a

new strong piece of cloth to a worn-out garment, which would make the rent worse; neither was it customary to put new wine into old leathern bottles (for such were in use in those days) lest the old dried skins should burst by the fermentation of the new wine, and so all would be lost. In both these comparisons, our Lord meant to shew that every thing should have its proper time and place. We have seasons of joy and trial, and we must suit the ordinance and the promise to this variety, and not carelessly put things together that have no agreement. Fasting agrees with mourning and penitence, and now that the bridegroom is absent, it seems a fit token of the Church's sorrow. He will soon return to his waiting people, and then no such token shall be required, for sorrow and sighing shall flee away. With what judgment and compassion does our blessed Saviour instruct all his people! how does he proportion all things according to their strength!

CHAP. IX. 18—38.

THE WOMAN WITH THE BLOODY ISSUE—TWO BLIND MEN HEALED—THE GREATNESS OF THE HARVEST.

While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose and followed him, and *so did* his disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind *him*, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about; and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place; for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, *Thou* son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened: and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See *that* no man know *it*. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake; and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few: Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

THE displays of the power and goodness of Christ are varied in every conceivable way. How just shall be our condemnation if we remain unmoved by these wondrous miracles—all of them emblems of spiritual healing—all of them pledges of Christ's willingness to save, unless the God of this world blind our eyes to the real state of our souls. Five miracles are here recorded. We shall briefly consider the circumstances of each, and then see what practical inference may be drawn from them.

First, a certain ruler of the synagogue came to plead in behalf of his daughter, whom he had left at the point of death, and who was actually dead by the time our Lord arrived at his house.* The physician's help would then be useless; but Christ is the "resurrection and the life," and "quickeneth whom he will." He immediately puts forth those persons, who, according to the custom of the Gentiles, were come to stir up lamentations with doleful, melancholy music.† He speaks of this young person's death as if it were only a sleep. The death of the righteous is but a sleep; they "sleep in Jesus:" they not only rest from toils and labours, but their bodies rest in hope of a joyful waking on the morning of the resurrection, when they shall wake refreshed—wake to a glorious life—to sleep no more! By the mere touch of his hand, our Lord restored this maid to life. While going to the house of this ruler, a certain woman came to him, who had an issue of blood twelve years, and of whom we are told, in another place, that she had spent all her money upon physicians, without deriving any benefit.‡ Her faith was strong, but her modesty forbids her speaking; she therefore touched the hem of Christ's garment, with the expectation of being healed, nor was she disappointed. But Christ would not allow her to steal this cure, unobserved: he therefore turned

* Hence ἄρτι ἐτελεύτησεν, v. 18, may be justly rendered "is by this time dead," which accords with Mark v. 23.

† The ancient Jewish custom was—to begin the lamentation not with musical instruments, but only voices of old women, who in a sad modulation, strove to extort lamentation from those who were present.—*Hammond.*

‡ Mark v. 26.

round, and pronounced her faith to be the means of her cure, while he magnified his power in effecting it.

Two blind men next present themselves; they cry; but, for a trial of their faith, Jesus declines to answer. They were in earnest—they longed to be healed, and therefore they followed Christ into the house, when, after obtaining a confession of their faith, and belief in his power, He who at first said, "let there be light, and there was light," now removed the darkness from their eyes, and made them capable of enjoying the light of heaven.—See the calamitous state of the world, and how various the afflictions of the afflicted are! We have no sooner dismissed *two blind men*, than we meet with a *dumb man*. How thankful should we be to God for our sight and speech! This poor man's dumbness was the effect of his being possessed with a devil. Christ strikes at the root of the evil: He cast out the devil, and the dumb spake. When Paul was converted, behold, he prayed *—then the dumb spake. If the spirit of the devil was taken out of our hearts, our mouths would oftener show forth the praise of the Lord.

But is there nothing to be gained from these miracles but the interest which the narrative excites? Yes, truly, there is, and we have reason to apprehend the safety of our state, if we look merely to the letter, and forget the spirit. What induced these people to look out for help?—the knowledge and feeling of their distemper. What brought them to Jesus for help?—the belief and persuasion that he could, and would help them. And what engaged him to help and relieve them?—their faith. Observe then, what faith implies. It implies a sense of want—and an application to Jesus for relief, with a firm trust in his grace and power. Do you find that any of these poor persons were rejected on coming to Christ?—No. Do you find that they waited to get better before they went to Christ?—No, they went at once; the more sick the patient, the greater need of the physician, and the less time to be lost in going to him. Read your own case in that of each of these poor petitioners. Be not ashamed to confess your wants; make but trial of the Saviour's love, and like them, you will show your thankfulness by telling what great things the Lord hath done for your souls.

St. Matthew closes this interesting chapter by telling us, that Jesus went about all the cities and villages, preaching and healing. His compassion was moved when he saw so many perish-

* Acts ix. 11.

ing for lack of knowledge. In the prospect, therefore, of the vast multitudes which would soon be gathered into the Church both from among the Jews and Gentiles, our Lord stirred up his disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers, *i. e.* zealous active ministers, into the harvest. Christ himself is the Lord of the harvest, and it is instructive to observe, that he who urged them to pray, answered that prayer immediately, as we shall see in the very next chapter. If we now look around the world and see the state of many nations, we may truly say, that "the harvest is great," but alas! "the labourers are few." Let us follow the directions here given us. Let us pray that the Lord may send forth missionaries, able, zealous, ministers of the Gospel, who may lead those wandering sheep into the fold of Christ's flock.

CHAP. X. 1—23.

THE FIRST MISSION OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: the first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James *the son* of Alpheus; and Lebbæus, whose surname was Thaddæus; Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot who also betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not in the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And, as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass, in your purses: Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall

speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another; for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come.

THIS chapter may be considered as an ordination sermon preached by our Lord when he sent out his apostles. They had already been disciples, or scholars; but now they are advanced to the rank and dignity of apostles. They were twelve in number, with reference to the twelve tribes of Israel.* Peter is first mentioned, not because he was prince of the apostles, but because he was the elder of the first two brothers, who were called to follow Christ, and conspicuous for his zeal. James was afterwards slain by Herod.† John, the beloved disciple, is often afterwards mentioned—he was commissioned to write much on his Saviour's love, and the bright prospects of the Church. Thaddæus, is the same as Jude, his name is thought to mean *hearty*—to distinguish him from the hypocrite Jude, who was also called Iscariot, perhaps from the town of Kerioth, in the tribe of Judah. This awful man was even then pointed out as the traitor, though as yet he had given no symptoms of his apostacy. Like the other apostles, he was sent forth to preach and to perform miracles, but God foresaw his treachery. Matthew was inspired to write the gospel now before us. Of the rest we hear but little, though doubtless used by the Lord of the harvest. They went forth, destitute of all external advantages to recommend them; they had neither wealth, nor learning, nor titles of honour, but they were empowered to work miracles, for the confirmation of the doctrine, to prove that it was of God. They were commissioned to heal all manner of sickness and disease, and that freely. Further, to shew the nature and complexion of the gospel kingdom, which is offered without money, and without price, the instructions given to them were full and particular. First, they were not to go to the Gentiles. The Jews had the first place in God's affection, and therefore must have the first offer of the Gospel: ‡ they were not to provide either gold, or silver, or food, for their journey, to shew that they must live in dependence upon Divine Providence, and to

* See Chap. xix. 28. † Acts xii. 1, 2. ‡ See Acts xiii. 46.

show further, that they had a right to a maintenance from those to whom they preached.

Having instructed his apostles whither they were to go—what work they had to do—and the method they were to take ; Christ next prepares them against the dangers and difficulties they were likely to meet with. He disguises nothing, he conceals nothing, but tells them they must expect even death, in the execution of their office. Kings and princes, and the world, with Satan at its head, would be opposed to them, but with Christ on their side, they had nothing to fear. The Gospel which they should preach, would be a Gospel of *peace*, and still strange to say, variance and divisions would follow from their preaching. This effect of the preaching of the Gospel, is not the fault of the Gospel, but of those whose hearts are opposed to it. When some believe the things that are spoken, and others believe them not, the faith and practice of those that believe, condemn those that believe not, and therefore they have an enmity against the others. This effect follows the preaching of the Gospel, even to this day. We may observe it in those families, where some of the members are followers of Christ, and where the others follow the ways of the world : there must be a division, for the two parties are travelling different roads ; but let Christ's admonition be regarded now, that whoever suffers the love, even of the nearest relation, to draw him from Christ, is not worthy of the name of his disciple.

It is important for us all to note the Saviour's direction to his Apostles, in the midst of their enemies. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." We all need the same caution. The wisdom here commended is not the craft of the world, but the spirit of a sound mind, by which we are able to discern things that differ, and which enables us to act discreetly to men. *Harmlessness* is not mere negligence, but a holy, consistent, demeanour,—gentle and forbearing, and yet not carried away by the wiles of the ungodly. May we thus shew forth the praises of our divine Master.

CHAP. X. 24—42.

THE APOSTLES WARNED OF VARIOUS TRIALS—COMFORTED BY THE PROMISE OF DIVINE SUPPORT.

The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his

lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the house-tops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

WITH the prospect of sorrow held out to the apostles in this chapter, the Lord adds the most consolatory promises. If for example they were to be brought before kings and councils for their Master's sake, they were to be endued with "the Spirit of their Father," and should know what to say in the most trying hour.—If they were to meet with persecution even in the cities of Israel, and be obliged to flee from place to place, they were to remember the path of sorrow which their Saviour trod, and not to be surprized that the household should be rejected, when they called the master Beelzebub, and cast him out. It is a great honour to be identified with a suffering Saviour; "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us."

To console his disciples still further in the prospect of severe persecutions and trials, he assures them of his providential care, which should never cease to watch over them, and give them a happy issue out of all their troubles. The utmost their enemies could do, would be to kill the body, but what would that be compared to the life of their souls. His Providence suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without his permission: he assures them that even the hairs of their heads were numbered; that

not even the slightest occurrence happened without his divine permission. Let all believers take comfort from this passage; if God numbers their hairs, much more does he take care of their lives, their comforts, their souls. They have a cross to bear while on earth, and it is often a heavy one, but no heavier than God wishes it to be; let them, then, be comforted, and look to "the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

One of the severest trials mentioned by our Lord is referred to in verse 36. "A man's foes shall be they of his own household."—It is difficult to oppose the wishes of near relatives. The father's frown is more painful than the scorn of strangers—the child's sins are too often passed over, and when rebuked, rebellion often follows; strange that religion should produce such divisions in a family. It is however not the *cause*—for this lies deep in the carnal nature of man, which hates the light; religion is the innocent occasion.* Can any one blame Christ, because a traitor was found in his household? Can any one condemn you, if you prefer Christ's favour and service before the good will of all your earthly relations? But is it so? Have you received the gospel-message for your own salvation? Do you know it? Are you seriously enquiring after it? Has the message of the Gospel reached your *heart?* These apostles preached, saying, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" but the nearer it is to you, the more just will be your condemnation, if you are not found *in it*. Search, try yourself whether you bear the marks of having been translated from the kingdom of darkness (your natural state of sin) into the kingdom of God's dear Son—the kingdom of grace. Are you at a loss to decide this point? see, then, whether the fruits of grace appear in your life; whether you have fled to Christ for refuge, and have been made a partaker of his Holy Spirit. Be assured, there will be no entrance for you into glory, unless you here receive the grace of God; and let those who are the children of God, look to that grace, as a pledge and earnest of their future inheritance in glory.

* John viii. 48—59.

CHAP. XI. 1—15.

JOHN SENDETH HIS DISCIPLES TO CHRIST—JOHN'S MISSION DESCRIBED.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

It has pleased God, in every age, so to deal with his most favoured servants, as to show, that though he has raised them up, and qualified them for his service, he is not dependant on them for the support of his work. How often do we see the most zealous servants of the Lord laid upon a bed of sickness, or cut off by an untimely death? He puts down one, and sets up another, just as he sees best. How strongly does this appear in the case of John the baptist: he had but a short time entered upon his useful ministry, when his labours were closed by his being cast into prison. We cannot imagine, that after the many testimonies he had received of Jesus being the true Messiah, *his own* faith was at all staggered by this imprisonment: but we can well conceive that his disciples, on hearing the wonderful miracles which Christ had wrought, might have supposed, that if he were the true Messiah, he would have shown more regard for John, and used his Almighty power to liberate him. Therefore, for the confirmation of *their* faith, John sends two of them to Jesus, to inquire whether he were the true Messiah, or

not.* To these messengers, our Lord gave not a mere verbal testimony, but he gave them the fullest evidence of their senses; he performed miracles in their presence, and desired them to tell John what they had seen and heard. One part of our Lord's testimony concerning himself must not be passed unnoticed: he appeals to the fact, that "the poor had the Gospel preached to them." It was foretold that "the poor of the flock" should wait upon him, that he should "deliver the needy when he crieth —the poor also and him that had no helper." † The Gospel of Christ is still the same; its blessings are now offered to the *poor*, because peculiarly suited to their condition; and the Bible, which declares these blessings, is as much the property of the *poor*, as it is of the rich.

After these messengers had departed, our Lord bore testimony to the character of John in the most exalted terms. The people had flocked to him from every quarter, and our Lord had asked them what sort of a person they had expected to hear and see: they had not travelled to see a fickle man "like a reed shaken with the wind;" or a soft, effeminate man, like those brought up in courts, or "king's houses;" but a prophet, who, with self-denying labour, and unshaken stedfastness, was instructing and reforming the land; and indeed he was like Elijah of old, whose spirit and character he bore, agreeably to the prophetic representation that had been given of him four hundred years before; ‡ yea, he was greater than any of the Old Testament prophets, for *they* only saw Christ at a distance, and spake of him as one to come; but John saw him already come: *they* said "A virgin shall conceive,"—John pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God." Yet eminent as John was, our Lord told his hearers, that the least in the kingdom of God was greater than he. John came in the dawn of the Gospel day, and therein excelled the foregoing prophets; but he was taken off before the noon of that day, before Christ's death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit; so that the least of the apostles and evangelists, having had greater discoveries made to them, was greater than John. "The kingdom of God" often means his kingdom of grace; taken in this sense, it here would refer, not only to the apostles or ministers of the Gospel,

* It has been a matter of controversy from the first, whether John made his enquiry for his own conviction, or for the good of his disciples. Chrysostom, among the ancients (Homily 36 on St. Mat.) and Whitby among modern writers have clearly proved the latter.

† Psalm lxxii. 12.

‡ See Mal. iv. 5, 6

but to all true Christians, who by a fuller discovery of Christ's character, and by a richer experience of his love, occupy a more exalted state than even John the Baptist. What reason have we to be thankful that our lot is cast in these days, under such advantages of light and knowledge! We have both the New Testament doctrine to explain the Old Testament prophecies, and the Old Testament prophecies to confirm and illustrate the doctrine of the New. The greater our advantages, the greater will our guilt be, if we "receive the grace of God in vain."

It is said in the 12th verse, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." This violence denotes a strength, and vigour, and earnestness of desire. They who would enter into the kingdom of heaven, must "strive to enter in." That kingdom suffers a holy violence; self must be denied; the frame and temper of the mind must be altered; a force must be put upon our corrupt nature; we must run, and wrestle, and fight, (but not in our own strength,) and all little enough to win such a prize. "The violent take it by force." They are determined to have un interest in Christ upon any terms, therefore they labour incessantly *in prayer*. Do *you* know any thing of this holy ardour, this struggling and striving in prayer, or do you expect to be saved in a quiet, easy way, while others feel such anxiety for the salvation of their souls? Be not deceived; God never intended to indulge the ease of triflers, but to provide a rest for them that labour. We would point out Christ to you as "the way;" give all diligence now, and, however careless you have hitherto been, strive to enter by *that* way, and so shall you make your calling and election sure.

NOTE on v. 12.—Some interpret βιασταὶ by the "publicans and soldiers," who as given to rapine deserved the name of "violent;" the word only occurs here in the New Testament, but in classic authors it seems to refer to the serious attention and ardent desire of the mind, as well as to outward violence. *See Wolfii Curæ Philologicæ.* vol. i. p. 196.

CHAP. XI. 16—30.

CHRIST UPBRAIDETH CHORAZIN, &C.—BABES ARE TAUGHT—INVITATION TO THE WEARY.

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped

unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*. Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.*

Our Lord exposes the perverseness of the Jews by an apt similitude. They resembled sullen children, who, being out of temper, quarrel with all the attempts of their fellows to please them. Their companions try to engage them by piping a cheerful tune, but they peevishly refuse to dance to it; and if they imitate the mournful strains, used at the houses of the dead, they refuse to lament. Thus the Jews found fault with all the attempts which God made to draw them to repentance. John Baptist came in a retired, abstemious manner, and with him they found fault for not mixing in their society. Christ came in a more free and social manner, and him they also censured, as "gluttonous and a wine-bibber;" so that as nothing could please them, all the invitations of the Lord were rejected. *We* shall one day know the wisdom of God in all his dealings with *us*—what calls we have had—what various occasions of improvement—and how he has endeavoured to suit himself to us, and work upon us, whether by prosperity or adversity, riches or poverty, sickness or health.

* Men are heavy laden—1. With crosses. 2. With rigour of law. 3. With Sin. Christ delivers from all. His yoke is easy only to him who can say—"that to obey is to reign."—See Leigh's Annotations, citing Bernard and Augustine.

We next read that a solemn woe was pronounced by our Lord upon those cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because their inhabitants remained impenitent. The doom of Chorazin and Bethsaida would be heavier than that of Tyre and Sidon, because these latter cities did not possess so many advantages as the former; and as to Capernaum, where our Lord chiefly resided, and which was exalted to heaven by extraordinary privileges, these would only tend to sink it deeper into hell, because such advantages were not improved. What cause have we to tremble when we read these words! Consider the advantages which we have, even beyond what Capernaum enjoyed; and if, after all, we are uninfluenced by the Gospel, how heavy shall be our doom! Surely it shall be far more tolerable for the heathen in the day of judgment, than for the wicked professors of Christianity; and there can be no doubt, but that multitudes of the inhabitants of this favoured land shall perish with deeper condemnation than those of Tyre, or even than those of Sodom or Gomorrah.

Jesus returns thanks to God, in that he was pleased to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven from the learned Scribes and wise men of the nation, and, at the same time, to reveal them to the poor and unlearned—to men of mean education, who were despised for their ignorance, but who were also simple, humble and teachable as children. Is this a fact? Can the unlearned poor attain to the knowledge of the truth? Yes; they are better fitted for it, and, in Christ's judgment, more likely to embrace it, than others; because the wise of this world are inclined to apply their own knowledge to the discovery of the truth, whereas nothing but the Spirit of God can give any person a *saving* knowledge, and this Spirit the poor can obtain as freely as the rich and learned. Why then will you plead your want of learning, and your station in life, as an excuse for not understanding God's word? Let your wants bring you to Christ, and you shall know all that is essential. "The world by wisdom knows not God:" let it be your wisdom to come to Christ in an humble, teachable spirit; remembering, that you can have no saving knowledge of God, except as it is revealed to you by the Holy Spirit.

But if a sense of unworthiness should tempt you to stay away, hear what comfortable words Christ says to you—"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You who are weary with a load of sin, and who groan on account of a sinful nature, come to Jesus; you, too, who

groan under a weight of heavy trial and affliction, come; the words are addressed to ALL, high and low, rich and poor, master and servant, old and young; come to Jesus and he will give you rest; yea, a two-fold rest, peace with God now, as the best support of the soul; and the perfect rest of glory, which shall never be interrupted by sin or sorrow. Christ is meek and lowly in heart, the best teacher you can have. Learn your lessons at his feet, and pray to be like him. He will not reject you, because you have been sinners; He calls you for that very reason to come to him, and he will enable you to forsake your sins: but if this seems hard, and you refuse to come, either because you think you can justify yourselves, or because you like your sins better than his forgiveness and holiness, you must be left to your own choice, and that is—never to know God and Christ—never to know a saving work of the Spirit—never to know ease and freedom, rest and peace, but to have the galling yoke of sin here, and to lie under the heavy punishment of it for ever hereafter!

CHAP. XII. 1—21.

WHAT MAY BE LAWFULLY DONE ON THE SABBATH.

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple. But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day. And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew *it*, he withdrew himself from thence:

and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

WE are here informed that the Pharisees, who were ever watching for an opportunity of condemning our Lord and his disciples, brought an accusation against them for a breach of the Sabbath. In going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, or on returning from it, the disciples, being hungry, plucked the ears of corn, rubbed them in their hands, and ate. The law allowed them to pull some ears in this manner, while passing through a corn-field.* It was not therefore to their taking another man's property that the Pharisees objected, but because they considered it equivalent to *reaping* and *threshing* the grain on the Sabbath-day. Thus they were very zealous about trifles, but openly violated the weightier commandments. They "strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel." But our Lord justifies the conduct of his disciples in this *apparent* breach of the law, by bringing forward two examples. They all allowed that David was a prophet, and a man after God's heart, yet, in circumstances of urgent necessity, he had not scrupled to eat the shew-bread, and to give it to his attendants; though the law required that none but the priests should eat it.† The priests themselves, also, at the temple, performed a great deal of labour on the Sabbath, in preparing the sacrifices, tending the fire on the altar, &c. yet it was allowed that they were blameless in what they did. These two examples proved that works of *absolute necessity* may be done on the Sabbath.

On another Sabbath, the Pharisees seeing a man with a withered hand, watched our Lord if he would heal him. He therefore asked if a single sheep of their's were to fall into a pit on the Sabbath, would they omit to pull it out; yet this would be attended with labour, whilst his healing miracles were performed without any. Having thus silenced them, he ordered the man to stretch forth his withered hand, and he was immediately cured. Thus our Lord explained the law of the Sabbath, and from his answers we learn, that *works of absolute necessity, and works*

* See Deut. xxiii. 25. † 1 Sam. xxi. 3.

of mercy, are lawful to be done on his holy day. Let us, however, beware, lest Satan tempt us to call those works *necessary*, which are *not so :* none can be sanctioned, except they are performed in the service of God, and in some way tend to his glory, or the benefit of our fellow-creatures.

But we have much to learn from this miracle of healing performed on the poor man with the withered hand. Like the other miracles of Christ, it may have a spiritual application, and may point to that disease which we all labour under—sin. It is Christ only, by the power of his grace, who can cure us ; and in order to our cure, he commands us to stretch forth our hands ; to stretch them out in prayer to God ; to stretch them out to lay hold on him by faith. Now, this man could not stretch forth his withered hand of himself, any more than the impotent man could arise to carry his bed, or Lazarus come forth out of his grave ; yet Christ bid him to do it, and in the attempt, strength was communicated to him. God says to us, " Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead ;" but we can neither awake, nor arise from the dead, unless Christ enables us. We must, therefore, pray for strength to obey the command, and rest upon his promise, wherein he says, " Turn ye at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit." Those who perish are as inexcusable as this man would have been if he had not attempted to stretch forth his hand, and so had not been healed ; while those who are saved, have no more to boast of than this man had of contributing to his own cure, by stretching forth his hand ; but are as much indebted to the power and grace of God as he was.

Young beginners in religion are weak ; some little life has been given, but it is like that of a bruised reed, when it is only held together by a slender shred ; some little heat—but it is like that of smoking flax, in which the spark is so small, that its existence is only known by the smoke which it emits. But see the compassion of Christ ; he will not discourage these weak Christians ; the reed that is bruised shall not be broken and trodden down, but shall be supported and strengthened ; the newly-lighted wick, though it only smokes, and does not flame, shall not be extinguished. Are you united to Christ even by a slender faith ? Have you even a spark of grace within your soul ? Though your faith be weak, yet if it be real—if it be the gift of God, he will take care of his own work, and will lead you on from strength to strength. But, oh ! remember, that until this spark of a new life is lighted in your soul, you have neither part, nor lot, in Christ ; and if you die without it, it would be better for you had you never been born.

CHAP. XII. 22—50.

THE PHARISEES ASCRIBE CHRIST'S MIRACLES TO SATAN—BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth, to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth *it* empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. Even so

shall it be also unto this wicked generation. While he yet talked to the people, behold *his* mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

We here read of an astonishing miracle performed by Christ. There was brought to him a man both blind and dumb. What a miserable case was his! he could neither see to help himself, nor speak to express his wants. A soul in its unconverted state is just in the like situation;—it is blind to the things of God, and dumb at the throne of grace: Satan blinds the eye of faith, and seals the lip of prayer. If this be your present state, observe, for your comfort, what follows: Christ came to destroy the works of Satan; and hence, upon this poor man's being brought to him, he healed him by casting out the devil, so that he spake and saw. Follow this man's example—make application to Christ, and the same effect will follow; your eyes shall be opened to see God's glory, and your lips to sing his praise. This miracle astonished the people, insomuch that they said, "Is not this the son of David?" The common people, you see, judged right. It was a clear case with them, that if Christ cast out devils, then the kingdom of God was come unto them. But the Pharisees, conceited of their knowledge, boldly affirmed that he wrought his miracles by the help of the devil. This assertion our Lord soon disproved, by showing that Satan was too wise to assist in ruining his own cause; for, as every kingdom or family which is divided into parties, contending with each other, must be weakened and ruined; so, it was evident, that if Satan aided Christ in casting out devils, the infernal kingdom was divided against itself, and could not therefore stand.

Our Lord's power in casting out devils is represented by an apt similitude. How could any one enter into a strong man's house and plunder his property, whilst he was on his guard, unless he was superior in strength, and first overpowered the strong man? Thus it was evident, that Jesus by his divine power was superior to Satan, or he never could rescue the bodies and souls of men from his dominion. This strong man, Satan, has possession of all our hearts by nature, and his power is greater than our's, so that, of ourselves, we cannot shake off his yoke; but we see here that Jesus has proved his superior power: if then we

feel Satan's bondage hard, and sin to be a burden, a word from Christ can remove it all, and to him alone we should go for help; He is as willing as he is able to relieve us.

The Lord Jesus having illustrated so fully his power over Satan, goes on to warn the unbelieving Jews of their danger in rejecting him—the stronger man. They had attributed his miracles to the influence of Satan instead of the finger of God, and therefore they sinned grievously against the Son of man. This sin, however, might be forgiven, and perhaps was actually forgiven to some present, on the day of Pentecost. Then, however, the dispensation of the Spirit would commence—a still clearer light would be given, and if they continued rejecting Christ's miracles they might be given up to an hardened heart, and they would then reject the gospel of peace with all that evidence of its truth, which was graciously vouchsafed by the out-pouring of the Spirit.* We have reason to fear that many did thus sin against the Holy Ghost at the first preaching of the apostles, and were given up to an impenitent heart; and we have also reason to fear the same judgment, if we trifle with our means—for then God may leave us to wilful unbelief, and never convert us to himself. We cannot, indeed, pronounce of others that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, but rather watch ourselves against all sin. Neither should tender consciences be overwhelmed with the fear of having committed it—their very dread of having done so, is an evidence that they are not given up to final impenitence and unbelief. Let us all remember that the best way of guarding against this, and every sin, is to have the heart purified by the Spirit of God, and thence will flow all those fruits of the Spirit which adorn our profession—and out of the abundance of a grateful heart, we shall utter such things as shall glorify God and edify man.

Notwithstanding all the miracles which the Scribes and Pharisees had witnessed, we find them still dissatisfied and unbelieving. They ask from our Lord a further sign of his divine mission; but though he would not grant their request in the way they wished, he yet informs them, that another sign should be given in his resurrection, of which the Prophet Jonah was a type; for as he was delivered by the power of God, after having been three days in the whale's belly, so Christ should be restored to life, after having been three days in the body of the earth;—

* See more fully in Whitby and Doddridge, who shew that this sin was not committed so much in Christ's day as in the clearer light of the dispensation of the Spirit, commencing with the pentecostal effusion.

thus Jonah was a sign to them. We find from the book of Jonah that the men of Nineveh were grievous sinners, and that God was about to destroy them, but previously, the Prophet Jonah was sent to preach to them:—He did preach, and they repented. Our Lord brings forward this example, to prove the obstinacy of the Jews, under their superior advantages. Jonah was a mere man, but Christ was the Son of God—Jonah wrought no miracles, but Christ wrought many miracles: yet the Ninevites "repented at the preaching of Jonah," but the Jews were unmoved by the preaching of Jesus. In like manner the Queen of Sheba would appear against the Jews to their deeper condemnation,* she came from a great distance, and uninvited, to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and when she came, she believed; not so the Jews, they heard *him* speak, who was wisdom itself, yet they believed not. How ready are we to blame their obstinacy, and wonder at their unbelief; but was none of all this intended for us? yes, surely; for like the Jews we may be full of doubt and carnal reasoning. The question is, are we decided in following the Lord Christ? Have we, according to Christ's command, renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil? If not, we still reject Christ as much as the Jews, yea, more so, for like Judas, we acknowledge him, while at the same time, we betray him for the sake of some worldly gratification, or for the pleasures of sin.

Our Lord further describes the danger of the unbelieving Jews by a parable, taken from the case of a demoniac. He supposes the evil spirit to depart from a person who had been possessed, and after trying in vain to possess some other person, it wanders about disconsolate, till after seeking rest and finding none, it returns to its former habitation, and finding no tenant there, it enters with increased power and virulence. Thus the preaching of John had in some degree dispelled the evil spirit from the Jews, but this was only for a season—it was a reformation of manners, and not a conversion of heart. The evil spirit would tempt the unbelieving Jews to reject Christ, and then return to his house again, so that their last state would be worse than the first. This parable is also applicable to ourselves: we may hear the word of God, we may be convinced of its truth, we may be in part reformed, but not truly converted; thus, the unclean spirit may retire for a while; but if Christ be not welcomed to dwell in our heart, if He do not

* 1 Kings x. 7, 8.

occupy that place which Satan has left, the evil spirit finding his habitation empty, swept from convictions and serious impressions, will return again, and render us seven-fold more callous and inveterate than before.

While our Lord was discoursing in this manner, he was interrupted by the arrival of his mother and some of his nearest relations, who, from some erroneous motives, wanted him, perhaps, to desist from his labours. But Jesus was aware of their intention, and inquired who his mother and brethren were, intimating thereby, that even *they* had no right to interfere in respect of his important work; and then stretching forth his hands towards his disciples, he declares that they were his mother and his brethren, and that his spiritual love to them was greater than any mere natural affection which he bore to his relations. Nor does he confine these expressions of love to the disciples then present, for he says, *whosoever* will do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister and mother. What is all earthly kindred to this relationship? And what words can express your folly, if you despise the blessing here offered you?

CHAP. XIII. 1—23.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SEED—THE EXPOSITION OF IT.

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea-side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow: And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched: and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns: and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. And the disciples came, and said unto him. Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they

should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them;* and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard *them.* Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one,* and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty.

It was the constant practice of our Lord to suit his preaching to the understanding of the people whom he addressed, and as it was "the common people who heard him gladly," while the rich and learned despised him, he generally explained his doctrine by illustrations borrowed from the common concerns of life.

The portion of Scripture just read, gives a specimen of his usual style; he wished to show the people what the great hindrances are which prevent so many profiting by the preaching of the Gospel, and for this purpose he presents a scene which all were familiar with—that of a husbandman sowing. The man went forth, sowing his seed, and if every spot was not alike productive, it must be owing to the difference of the soil. Some of his seeds fell on the high road, and they, of course, were immediately picked up by the birds; others fell on stony ground, and though for a time they promised well, yet in the end they perished for lack of moisture; others again fell in a rude, uncultivated spot, where thorns and briars were allowed to remain, and their growth was naturally checked, and the tender blade was smothered: while some fell upon ground which had been previously ploughed, and prepared, and so they flourished and brought forth the expected fruit.

This parable is thus spiritualized: Christ is the chief husbandman; the seed is the word of the Gospel which is contained in the Bible; this seed is sown by Christ, either immediately, or by his ministers. Some persons only sow *chaff*, but such are not Christ's faithful servants, and their chaff will never bring forth fruit; Christ's godly ministers will preach the pure, simple, doctrine of the Bible: this is like true, clean grain, which has

life in it. The ground in which this good seed is sown, is the hearts of men. A faithful minister preaches the word of God; some of his congregation have hearts as hard as the public road, so that nothing can penetrate them; they hear the word, but how long does it remain? just so long as they are within the walls of the house of God, and no sooner do they leave that house, than the world rushes into the mind. Satan, ever watchful, prepares some temptation; the instruction which was heard, is removed, as the seed is picked up by the birds, and no fruit can follow. Is this your case? Oh! forget not that you will be called to account for every grain of instruction, rebuke, and warning, which ever was cast upon the ground of your heart.

The stony ground hearers are not apparently so bad. They retain what they hear even beyond the walls of the church; they promise to do well, and for a while seem hopeful: but they are ridiculed for their religion, they are persecuted on account of it, and this they cannot bear; their unconverted hearts were only covered over with a superficial appearance of sincerity, and like the grain which is exposed to the sun from above, and has a rocky bed beneath, they perish for want of spiritual support. There are multitudes of this class who, for a while show the blade of profession, where there is not the root of grace. In order to bear the heat of the sun, a plant must be well watered, and must have depth of earth to retain the moisture; so, a person's heart must be softened and prepared by the Spirit, and he will then derive sap and nourishment from Christ, without which he never can outlive the persecution, the dangers, and difficulties, to which he will be exposed in the world.

Some of the minister's congregation are more hopeful than either of the former; their hearts seem tender and suitably disposed, but no pains have been taken to stop the growth of worldly-mindedness, to remove the indulgence of sinful pleasure, or to check the deadening influence of prosperity; and so, like seed overgrown by briars and thorns, their fair professions wither and die. Alas! how many such are there in the world! they think to allow brambles and wheat to grow in the same field—religion and worldly pleasure to spring up together: but it is impossible; it is a divided service, which God will disdain. If this be your case, pray of God to remove these brambles, root and branch, from your heart, that the word of his grace may have free room to enlarge and fructify.

One class of hearers, alone, are represented as deriving ad-

vantage from the preaching of the Gospel; they are those who receive the word in a *good heart*. And what is a good heart? let us first inquire what we should consider to be *good ground?* such, surely, as had been well ploughed, well manured, softened by the rain of heaven, and prepared by the hands of the husbandman. And all this must be done, *spiritually*, to our hearts, before they can be called *good*. They are, by nature, as hard as the high road, which is impenetrable to any seed, and leaves the grain exposed on the surface. But even the high road could be made fruitful by proper pains and culture—so also can our naturally hard hearts. Do we then desire to profit by the preaching of the Gospel, and to bring forth fruit to the glory of God? let us pray of him to break these hard and stony hearts, to cause the dew of his grace to fall, and the unction of his Holy Spirit to be shed abroad upon them, and so shall they be ready to receive and retain the good seed of the kingdom of God: let us recollect that *good* hearts are *prepared* hearts, such as God has made fit for the reception of the Gospel. No other hearts can be called good.

Do we wish to know if our hearts are thus prepared? it can be easily ascertained; we know that abundance of seed has been repeatedly sown; is it growing? are we bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and holiness? Let each of us then pray, "Lord, prepare my heart, make it soft and tender, for Christ's sake send thy Holy Spirit, that thy word may take root within me;" then we shall have peace and joy in believing, and shall escape the curse pronounced on those whose "hearts are waxed gross, whose ears are dull of hearing," and whose hearts are closed against the gospel, lest they should be converted and live.

NOTE.—Teelman, cited by Trench, gives an excellent definition of a parable—"A similitude taken from ordinary things to set forth something spiritual and heavenly."—On the nature and interpretation of parables, see Trench's admirable work.—Notes on the parables of our Lord Jesus Christ, chap. i. and chap. iii.

CHAP. XIII 24—58.

PARABLES OF THE TARES—OF THE MUSTARD SEED—OF THE LEAVEN—OF THE PEARL.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men

slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them: The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man: the field is the world: the good seed are the children of the kingdom: but the tares are the children of the wicked *one:* The enemy that sowed them is the devil: the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Again: The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Again, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe *which is* instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things* new and old. And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this *man* this wisdom, and *these* mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not

all with us? Whence then hath this *man* all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

THE latter part of this chapter, which has just been read, contains several parables, all tending to give a familiar explanation of the doctrines of the Gospel. They are all so instructive, that a little must be said on each. First, our Lord wishing to show the people that there would always be a mixture of good and bad in the Gospel church, till the great separation at the last day, explained his meaning by the case of a man who sowed good seed in his ground; but no sooner had he done so, than a designing enemy tried to spoil his labour, by sowing *tares* * in the same field, expecting that in rooting out the weeds, some of the good crop might be destroyed. But the wise husbandman defeated the plan, by suffering both to grow together till the harvest, when they could be easily separated; the good corn laid up in the granary, and the weeds consigned to the flames. Thus is it in the visible church: God made man upright, but Satan has sowed the seeds of sin. At present, good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, profess the name of Christ, and call themselves Christians. It is impossible now to separate hypocrites from the sincere followers of Christ; they have been in the Church catholic from the beginning, and will be found there until the Saviour returns to reign.† Then the angels will "*cast out* of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,"—a declaration which proves that this binding and burning of the tares, answers to the destruction of the wicked, who shall be found living among the righteous, like weeds among the standing corn, and who shall be destroyed by the Saviour at his second advent; rather than to the final separation which shall take place at the end of the millennium: a day indeed is coming when a separation shall be made: not a single individual of Christ's true servants shall be forgotten by him, or shall perish with the ungodly, and none of the unconverted multitude, however covered their guilt may be, shall escape the sentence of condemnation. Those who were associates in guilt and vice, shall be so

* Ζιζάνιον does not occur in the Septuagint; it is rendered by some *cockle* or *darnel*, but appears rather to be an inferior kind of wheat; which, Jerome says, can scarcely be distinguished from good wheat, until it is in full ear.—See Greswell on the Parables. Vol. II. p. 79.

† "Do you dare to usurp the office of another, which will not be your's even in the harvest."—*Augustine.*

in suffering; a bundle of infidels, a bundle of scoffers, a bundle of hypocrites, and a large bundle of careless and indifferent professors, shall be as fuel for the flame, while the true followers of Jesus shall be "*bound in the bundle of life*" with him.

Jesus next shows what great events spring from small beginnings. This he illustrates by the growth of the mustard-seed, which, though very small, branches out into a large and fruitful tree; or, by leaven, which though very small in quantity, disperses itself through the whole mass of flour in which it is placed. The instruction contained under these parables may be two-fold: our Lord either meant to show the rapid spread of Christianity over the world, though its beginning was small and unpromising: or, he meant to describe the moral influence of true religion, wherever it is propagated.* Like leaven it may be hidden from the sight, but it works deeply, and produces great effects on the individual character and the face of society. Let us here apply it to our own case,—to the growth of religion in our own hearts. Religion is a *growing* principle; it springs from the seed of divine grace, and when this is sown in the heart of any person, it will take root within him—it will daily grow more strong and powerful, it will bring forth fruit in due time, and will be usefully employed for others. Have you no room in your heart for this little seed—the grace of God? Has it been sown? Is it flourishing? Ask for it without delay, and commit the growth of it to Christ, under whose care it will flourish. Again, religion is like leaven: but leaven will not work upon corn unground, nor does the Gospel, in souls unhumbled, unbroken for sin. The Spirit of God must break and soften the heart, and then the Gospel will leaven it; *i. e.* religion will so work itself into the man, and disperse its principles within him, that his whole life and conversation will be tinctured by it; religion will be manifest in every thing he says and does. Blessed and happy are those who are in such a state.

Hitherto our Lord had compared the kingdom of God to small things, because its beginnings were small; but lest any should thence take occasion to think meanly of it, he represents the great value of it by two parables. First, by "a treasure *hid* in a field," which was often done by those who had great riches in former times.† A man may be walking over a field

* Greswell has ably shewn that the parable of the grain of mustard refers to the rapid progress of Christianity, as a proof its divine origin,—and that the parable of the leaven sets forth the moral influences of Christianity on the corrupt mass of mankind.—See his 'Exposition of the Parables,' Vol. II. 151—214.

† See Jer. xli. 8, and Josephus. Wars, vii. 2.

every day for years, without suspecting that there is a mine of gold under his feet; but when once he discovers it, he sells all he has to buy that field, and digs diligently till he possesses the treasure. This treasure is Christ. The Bible is the field in which this treasure is hid: a man may read the Bible every day, and after all, know nothing of Christ, or, only by hearsay; but when once he learns by God's teaching that there is a treasure in the Bible—when he wishes to *enjoy* Christ, to *possess* that spiritual treasure which is to be found in him; he then counts all but loss that he may win him, parts with every thing for his sake, and searching deep into the Word of God, he finds a treasure there which he never knew before. The reason why so many slight the Bible is, because they only look at the surface of the field, they do not dig as for hidden treasure. Be persuaded that there are immense riches in the word of God; pray that your eyes may be opened to see them; you will then know that the religion of Christ is, what our Lord explains it to be,—a source of inestimable riches, which can never be lost or exhausted.

Our Lord again enforces this subject by the parable of the merchant-man seeking for "goodly pearls,"—not common ones, but such as are really valuable. It is said that pearls are found in clusters, but that one is more excellent than the rest, and that all fall into the hands of the man seeking for them, when the best is obtained.* Christ is our pearl of great price,—seek for him, and you will find him, and then all things else shall be yours. Oh! do you not long for this treasure? it is to be found in Christ, and Christ is to be found in the Bible. Say not that you are poor and unlearned, for these are simple truths; say not that you are too much hurried in worldly matters to attend to them, for your soul's salvation hangs upon your obtaining this treasure. If you pray earnestly, the Lord will open your eyes; you will then see that Jesus is the pearl of great price; you will come to him in faith, desiring his salvation, resting your souls upon him for acceptance with God, and resolving to be governed by him. You will then be richer than if you possessed thousands of gold and silver; and without this treasure, though you were the king on his throne, you would be poor and needy.

After repeating these parables, our Lord said to the multitude, "Have ye understood all these things?" The same question

* See Origen's interesting description of pearls. *Opera.* Tom. III. pp. 449—451, large folio.

may be put to you now: if you have, blessed are you if you follow them. If not, go to Christ in prayer, as the disciples did, and say, "Lord, declare unto us the parable;" he will explain it to *you* as readily as he did to *them.*

NOTE.—The nature of this work prevents any thing like a full exposition of each parable. The reader must seek it, when required, in such Commentaries as Calvin's exposition of "The Tares and the Wheat," Scott and Henry, Trench and Greswell.

CHAP. XIV.

WHY JOHN BAPTIST WAS BEHEADED—MULTITUDES FED—CHRIST WALKETH ON THE SEA TO HIS DISCIPLES.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus; and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put *him* in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded *it* to be given *her*. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought *it* to her mother. And his disciples came and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard *of it,* he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard *thereof,* they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. And when it was evening his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them. They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass; and took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake; and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch

of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

When Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, he was struck with apprehension that it was John the Baptist that had risen from the dead. His conscience told him he had offered an unjust violence to an innocent person, and he was afraid that he had come again to be revenged on him. How severe are the terrors and tortures of a guilty conscience! A wicked man needs no worse tormentor than his own mind. Let us observe, that the cause of the Baptist's being put to death, was his boldly telling a king of his crime: it is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Herod divorced his real wife, to marry Herodias the wife of his brother Philip, and for this sin John faithfully rebuked this wicked prince. The Baptist was therefore cast into prison, and fell a victim to the revenge of an adulterous woman.* The servants of God should have both courage and impartiality: courage, to fear no man; impartiality, in sparing no sins, how high soever the situation of the person committing them may be; for our Saviour says to us, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

We find the king was sorry to put John to death: wicked men often sin with a troubled and disturbed conscience. They have a mighty struggle with themselves before they commit their sins: but at last the voice of conscience is drowned by their wicked desires. So it was with Herod: notwithstanding his sorrow, he sent, and beheaded John, and we are told that he

* See a full description of this Herod, called Antipas, by Josephus. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 7.

did so, first, for his oath's sake. Observe his hypocrisy; he made conscience of a rash oath, though he did not scruple to commit murder. Another reason for this horrid act was, regard to his reputation; they that sat with him, heard his promise, and would be witnesses against him if he did not perform it; thus he "loved the praise of man more than the praise of God." The wicked woman not only required John to be beheaded, but that his head should be brought in a charger, or dish, to them. Herodias did not think herself safe until John was dead, and she could not believe he was dead, until his head was brought to her! How cruel was the heart that could take pleasure in such a sight!

So astonished were the people at the wonderful works of our Saviour, that they followed him even into the deserts. The disciples, in pity to them, because they had fasted all day, requested our Saviour to send them away, that they might buy food; but he answers, "They need not depart, give ye them to eat." The disciples had nothing for themselves; how then could they feed a multitude? Divine power could alone enable them; and let us learn from this, that when Christ requires of us what, of ourselves, we are unable to perform, it is to show us our weakness, and to make us look to him and pray to him, from whom, alone, we can obtain power to obey his commandments. By our Saviour's blessing before he distributed the bread, we are taught to ask God for his blessing on his own gifts, and not to sit down to our food, as beasts to their forage; and by our Saviour's command to take up the fragments that nothing may be lost, we see that waste of any thing will be regarded by him as sinful.*

After this our Lord sent his disciples away, whilst he dismissed the multitude, and then retired into a mountain to pray, teaching us, that even he, the Christ, thought prayer a necessary duty. While thus engaged in happy communion with his Father, the disciples were in a ship, when there came on a violent storm, which seemed to endanger their lives; but Christ saw their distress, and went to them, walking on the sea; upon which his disciples, thinking it had been a spirit, cried out for fear; but when they heard the joyful sound, "It is I," their fears subsided; one word from Christ revives them, and restores them to peace. Peter asked permission to go to him on the sea, and having received it, he made the attempt: his faith gave him power to step on the waters, but it was distrust which made him sink: while he looked to Jesus, the sea remained firm under

* Prov. xviii. 9.

his feet, but the moment he wavered and thought of himself, it yielded beneath him. If *we* would walk upon the waves of this troublesome world, we should not let the sense of our own weakness make us doubt the power of Christ,—we should follow his command by relying on his assistance, and keeping the eye of faith continually on him: according as we doubt, we shall sink. But take notice, the compassionate Saviour laid hold on Peter, and Peter laid fast hold on him. If we let go our dependance on Christ, we sink; if he leaves us, we perish; but no sooner do we seek his mercy, than we find it, for "the Lord is nigh unto all that call upon him faithfully." Christ justly rebuked Peter: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" but he did not let him sink. Immediately on his going into the ship, the wind ceased, and they worshipped him, and glorified him as the true Son of God. It is he alone who can calm the storm, and still the raging of the sea; it is he alone who can pour upon the heart, agitated by the afflictions of life, that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and give resignation and submission to his will.

CHAP. XV. 1—20.

ON HUMAN TRADITIONS—WHAT DEFILETH A MAN.

Then came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is* a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. *Ye* hypocrites! well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into

the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

We find, in the first part of what has just been read, a contest between our Saviour and the Scribes and Pharisees, concerning old traditions and customs, which they attended to, much more than to the commandments of God. They complained that his disciples ate without washing their hands, not because cleanliness was so desirable, but because washing before meat was regarded by them as a religious duty: and this, they say, was handed down from Moses by oral tradition, though not given in the written law. These traditions the Pharisees either placed on a level with the scriptures, or used them in opposition to the plain commands of God.* Tradition is only useful as a *witness* to the truth of God given us in holy Scripture. It may shew what books were received by the early church, as inspired, and what doctrines and practices were followed by the primitive Church—but if traditions are ever made a part of the rule of faith, as the Jews and the Church of Rome have made them, they become a source of great error—they form a convenient way of introducing novelties and of setting aside the pure doctrines of God. Thus our Lord accuses the Pharisees of grievous error from exalting their traditions to a wrong position, and he gives an instance of their violating one of God's commandments from this very cause. The law of God requireth children to honour their parents: now, the Jewish Church invented a tradition; (which the Pharisees taught,) that if any one presented a gift to the temple, he should be absolved from providing for his poor helpless parents, and might take praise to himself for giving to the priests, or to the temple, that which should have gone to his parents' relief. This tradition our Lord severely censured, because the observance of it made it necessary for the Jews to break the law of God, and in every case we are to "obey God rather than man."

The Jews were not only strict in following these traditions, but were scrupulous in observing all the rights and ceremonies of their law, erroneously conceiving, that mere outward cere-

* Thus the Talmud, "The words of the scribes are lovely beyond the words of the law, for the words of the law are weighty and light, but the words of the scribes are "all weighty." Hieros. Berac. fol. 3. Such is the effect of admitting tradition; it is soon put above the written word.

mony would be accepted by God, without inward holiness; here, however, they greatly erred; God looks to the *heart*, and unless our religion be that of the heart, we may be strict observers of every outward ordinance, and yet, after all, be cast away.

After the Saviour thus rebuked the Pharisees, he turned to the multitude, and exposed (by the familiar metaphor of eating) the source of all spiritual pollution. It is not what we eat and drink that defiles us; not the eating one kind of food, and abstaining from another; but it is the filthiness and impurity of our hearts by nature, that produces every species of wickedness. The Pharisees were much offended by finding their false tenets and doctrines detected and published, but our Lord was not to be intimidated by the wrath of man, from openly avowing his disapprobation of all false teachers, who are always inclined to leave the divine word for the doctrines and opinions of men. Such a plantation is not of God; the trees of the Lord are those which bear the fruits of righteousness from the root of truth; all others are planted by Satan, and though they may appear to prosper for a time, they shall be finally rooted out by the great husbandman. How many in our day, as in our Lord's time may be called "blind leaders of the blind,"—they lead the ignorant and unstable *from* Christ, instead of guiding them to the narrow way, and hence the awful consequence so often follows—"both fall into the ditch" and perish together.

The disciples, not understanding Christ's metaphor, asked him, when alone, what the parable meant. He wondered, and reproved them for not comprehending what was so very obvious—that it is out of the sinful and corrupt heart that all unrighteousness proceeds; the temptations and occasions of sin are from without, but the original fountain from whence it flows is from the heart within, which throws up the depravity and filth it generates and conceives; * it is *this* that causes the defilement of man; but the neglect of outward ceremonies (the production of human invention) cannot in the least injure him. Seeing then how deceitful and wicked the heart of man is, may the Lord look upon us, and by the power of his grace "create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us."

* See Gen. vi. 5. and viii. 21.

CHAP. XV. 21—39.

CHRIST HEALETH THE DAUGHTER OF THE WOMAN OF CANAAN—A GREAT MULTITUDE FED IN A MIRACULOUS MANNER.

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* son of David! my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me! But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them *those that were* lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel. Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

OUR blessed Saviour, ever anxious to extend his glorious Gospel, went into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, cities which belonged to the Gentile territory and not to the Jews—to whom was his ordinary mission. These examples of Gentile converts were a first fruit of that multitude who should be gathered out of all nations, as the Church of Christ; they ought to remind us of the great mercy we have found in the eyes of God, in that he hath "to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." * A

* Acts xi. 18.

Canaanitish woman came out to meet him and urgently entreated his mercy for her daughter, who was grievously vexed with the devil; she called him her "Lord," and "the son of David," thereby acknowledging both his divine and human nature. At first He returned no answer to her importunities, to show that He sometimes thinks it better for us not to answer our prayers at once; and, when urged by his disciples to send her away, he rather repulsed her, showing that he often wishes to try our faith, by the continuance of affliction. He told her, that his first mission from heaven was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and not to strangers; but still she was earnest in her entreaties; she cried to him for help, and worshipped him, but He repulsed her again with apparent severity, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs," thus calling the Jews "children"—but giving her and all the Gentiles the name of "dogs." Her answer was remarkable, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table"—as if she had said, 'I know that I am a dog, because a Gentile sinner. I am content to be so called, my nature is defiled, my outward estate far from the privileges of the children, the Jews; yet though a dog, I am not a *stranger*, for I may creep under the table of mercy and partake of the morsel left for the dogs who are allowed to remain near the master.' * What faith and humility was this! her view of herself was abasing—her faith in Christ's power and love was exalted. She agrees to the Lord's plan, without murmuring—that the bread must not be given to the Gentiles, till he had tried every means for the conversion and salvation of his ancient people. But so anxious was she to gain her object, and so sensible of the Saviour's power, that she meekly submitted to the humiliating name he gave her, and only supplicated for the crumbs of mercy that might fall from him.

Let us now inquire whether we are as anxious for the salvation of our souls, as this poor woman was for the recovery of her daughter. Do we, like her, cry to Jesus, saying, "O Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on us?" Are we content with the daily repetition of some form of prayer in which our hearts are not engaged, and no sooner rise from our knees than we forget what we asked for, and seem careless whether we receive our request or not? And do we call this *prayer?* Alas? it is no such thing. Let us take this woman for our example; let us

* See Chrysostom's striking Homily on Matt. xv. Hom. liii. Vol. vii.

copy her earnestness and perseverance; let us ask of God to give us willing minds to desire spiritual blessings—"that good part which shall not be taken" from us; and though the Saviour may appear to disregard us for a while, yet will it be but for the trial and strengthening of our faith, and after patient perseverance, we shall hear him say, "be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

There is some difference between the miracle of the loaves and fishes here recorded, and that previously mentioned in chap. xiv. In the latter, the disciples made the request that the wants of the multitude should be attended to. In this, they seemed to suffer hunger willingly for nearly three days, whilst listening to our Lord's heavenly words; and he then proposes to feed them by a miracle. Twelve baskets of fragments were taken up in the former case, and only seven here—though the number fed was less. All our supplies are dealt out in the Lord's measure—whether less or more, it is just what should be. May we live by faith on the inexhaustible fulness of Christ.

NOTE.—v. 37. It may be remarked, that σπυρίδας means large baskets, such as are used for storing provisions. Whereas κοφίνους (ch. xiv. 20.) signifies travelling baskets.

CHAP. XVI. 1—20.

THE JEWS REQUIRE A SIGN—THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES—PETER'S CONFESSION.

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting, desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be* fair weather; for the sky is red: And in the morning, *It will be* foul weather to-day; for the sky is red and lowring. O *ye* hypocrites! ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not *discern* the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed. And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have taken no bread. *Which* when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea

Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

In the first part of this chapter it is related that the Pharisees and Sadducees, though of quite contrary sects and opinions, united in tempting and opposing Christ; and not satisfied with the many earthly signs he had shown of his divine nature, in multiplying the loaves, and healing the sick and maimed, they required a sign from heaven. But our Saviour, knowing that the demand was made more to gratify their curiosity, than to work their conversion, rejected it with severity, and told them, that they who could with such accuracy form a judgment of the future weather, from the aspect of the sky, could as easily (were they not blinded by obstinacy and hardness of heart) discern from prophecy, and from the wonderful miracles he had wrought, that the time of the Messiah was come, and that *He was* the Messiah; but they were a wicked generation, seeking after signs of their own choosing, and rejecting those that were given them; therefore they should have no sign except that of the Prophet Jonas, which was an exact type of his rising from the dead after three days: on this he left them and departed. How dreadful! What should be our state if Christ were to leave us? It would be the same—yea, far worse than if the sun were blotted from the heavens, and darkness to succeed. If you have not yet come to Christ, you are in this state of darkness, for it is all the same whether he leave *us*, or we keep ourselves from *him*.

We see after all our Lord's teaching how dull his disciples still remained; they put a carnal sense upon his words, and understood that he desired them to beware of the leaven of bread; but Christ undeceived them, and reproved them for their want of faith, in supposing that he who had twice abundantly fed so many thousands on a few loaves, could not with ease provide them with bodily sustenance, and then told them to beware of

the false doctrine of the Pharisees, which, like leaven, diffused itself among persons, unhappily predisposed to receive erroneous doctrines. But are we really surprised at the want of faith in the disciples on this occasion? let us turn our eyes within, and ask ourselves, whether the many miracles we have heard of in the course of this Gospel, have convinced us of the power of Jesus, and brought us to faith in him? Alas! if Christ were present, he would say to many of *us*, "How is it that you do not understand?" "Why do you not believe?"

When Jesus asked his disciples "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" they answered, that there was a diversity of opinions with regard to him; some saying he was John, others Elias, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked them, "but whom say ye that I am?" Peter, in the name of them all, says, "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" a confession so full and decisive, that our Lord declared that it was not taught to him by man, but by the revelation of God. And then he adds the promise, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The rock on which the church was built is not Peter, but his *confession of faith*, or which is the same thing, Christ himself, as if the Lord had said, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this *rock* which thou hast confessed; on this rock, which thou hast acknowledged, saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, I will build my church, that is, I will build my church upon *myself*, and not myself upon you.' * This gives no supremacy to Peter, but only the honour of being called a rock or stone after his master, whom he so promptly confessed.

Our Lord also promised to give to Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The proper use of keys, is to admit and let out, and so Peter was first sent to admit the Jews,† and then the Gentiles,‡ into the gospel kingdom. And thus he had the power of binding and loosing committed to him, that is, of admitting those who should be admitted, and of excluding, by apostolic censure, those whose sins called for excommunication. This power was afterwards given to all the rest of the apostles,§ and therefore Peter had no supremacy over them, much less has

* Augustine's Works. vol. v. p. 415. See also Chrysostom, Hom. lv. in Mat. The same view was taken by Hilary de Trinitate, 6.—Theodoret, Epist. 77; and even by Gregory the Great. Epis. iii. 33. Among moderns see Beza's note and Lightfoot's conclusive observations on the text.

† Acts ii. 41. ‡ Acts x. 45—48. § Matt. xviii. 18.

the pope, who cannot be Peter's successor, for he is not an apostle, nor is he inspired. Bishops and pastors have indeed so far the power of binding and loosing, because by sacraments, preaching, and church censures, they admit or exclude from the visible church.

Suppose now that Christ were present at this time and place, to ask *us*, as he did the disciples, "whom say *ye* that I am?" what should we say to him? Have we the answer ready, and could we say, as Peter did, from the heart, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God," through whom alone we have forgiveness of sins, peace of mind and conscience, and the hope of everlasting life? Blessed, indeed, is that soul, to whom Christ, the Son of the living God, is *thus* revealed; flesh and blood never revealed this to any man. We may, by instruction and inquiry, be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, but a *saving* knowledge of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit.

CHAP. XVI. 21—28.

JESUS FORESHEWETH HIS DEATH—REPROVETH PETER FOR DISSUADING HIM FROM IT.—WE MUST BEAR THE CROSS AND FOLLOW HIM.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

We now enter on the second part of the gospel history, written by St. Matthew, and the disciples were now called to a deeper course of instruction. Our Lord had thus far aimed at shewing them that he was the Christ of God, the true Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. Now he begins to dwell on the awful subject of his rejection by men and his propitiatory sufferings for the sin of the whole world.

We may perceive from this portion of our Lord's communications, how ignorant the disciples were in the mysteries of the kingdom of God, for Peter, on hearing of Christ's sufferings, took him aside and began even to *rebuke* him, as if the Lord had said something wrong. He besought our Lord to spare himself, and seemed to hope that the Father would keep him from such an hour.* He was impelled to make this request, partly from a false zeal and ignorant love, which would save his master from the wrath of the elders and chief priests, and partly from the hope of his still attaining temporal power: he still fondly trusted that Christ should gain earthly dominions; his heart was still bound to the things of this world; but our blessed Saviour turned upon him, and severely rebuked him for this worldly spirit, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan, (or adversary,) thou art an offence unto me." Evil suggestions in the mind come from Satan, and hence the man who allows himself to be the organ of Satan, or to be guided by him, may properly be called by his name.

This conduct of Peter was the cause of our Saviour's telling his disciples how necessary it was to relinquish all earthly advantages when they became his followers. To take up the cross and follow Christ with decision, with self-denial, with unabated zeal, is no easy matter. We might easily bear about us the emblem of the crucifixion, and remain as far from God as ever; but to plant the cross in the heart, to mortify the uprisings of the flesh, to deny the cravings of our fallen nature, to resist the enticements of Satan and the world, in all their varied shape, this is truly difficult, and needs a strength more than human. The duty is ours, but the strength is from God. "If ye *through the Spirit* do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." One great help to this duty is here given by our Lord, viz. to weigh the value of the soul with the things of this world. Let us place them both in the balance of the sanctuary. The world will be found, in all its weight put together, transitory, unsatisfying and polluted. The soul, immortal and suited for converse with God himself. Shall we hesitate in our choice? Alas! how apt are we to endeavour to reconcile the service of God and of the world, not considering how awful are the denunciations pronounced in Scripture upon those who do not leave *all* earthly objects, if necessary, for Christ's sake. He is worthy of all the

* So the words, in verse 22, ἵλεώς σοι imply, which are rendered in our version, "Be it far from thee," but with the ellipsis supplied it would be, "may God be propitious to thee, and spare thee."

sacrifices we can make; to neglect our souls is to neglect Christ; the winning of the world is often the losing of the soul, and he that loses his soul, though it be to gain the world, makes a bad bargain, and will sit down at last an unspeakable loser.

CHAP. XVII. 1—13.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST.—THE COMING OF ELIAS.

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart. And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

We have here an account of our Lord's transfiguration. He had said, in the last verse of the chapter preceding, that there were some present who should not taste of death till they had seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom; and now were his words fulfilled, for the three apostles, Peter, James, and John, were favoured with a sight of the Redeemer in that glorious appearance which he shall have when he comes in his kingdom.*

The object of our Lord's transfiguration seems to have been twofold. First, to give a sensible demonstration to the disciples of his being the Christ. It was a convincing proof of his Godhead, when the divine nature broke through the outward covering of his flesh; and St. Peter afterwards referred to it as such, when he said, "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables

* "The transfiguration was nothing else but an announcement of the second coming of Christ; in which Christ and his saints shall shine."—*Theophylact.*

when we made known unto you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, *but were eye-witnesses of his majesty.*" * Secondly, to give a specimen of that glorious body which each of his believing people shall have hereafter, according as St. Paul says, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned *like unto his glorious body.*" † On this occasion, Moses and Elias appeared with him; Moses, representing the law—Elias, the prophets; whilst the Apostles that were with him on the holy mount, shadowed forth the Gospel dispensation, intimating that the law, the prophets, and the Gospel, all centred in Jesus, and testified of him.

At this solemn season, the Father's voice was heard from "the excellent glory," acknowledging in the same words as at his baptism, that Jesus was his beloved Son, in whose person, character, righteousness, and mediation, he was well pleased, and fully satisfied. What consolation is this truth calculated to afford! Man has sinned beyond the power of his own recovery, and can effect *nothing* in the way of his justification before God; but "help is laid upon one that is mighty"—Jesus has undertaken the office of Mediator, and God has expressed satisfaction with his atonement. Guilty, rebellious man, who longs for pardon and deliverance, may now rejoice, for God has found a ransom. But observe, those who profit by Christ, must "hear him"—hear what he declares in his written word, and not only hear, but follow it.

On seeing this glorious sight on the mount, Peter conceived that he was almost in heaven, and exclaimed, "Lord! it is good for us to be here," and then proposed to erect three tabernacles, or temporary huts, for Jesus, Moses, and Elias. But Peter spoke ignorantly: Christ had not yet finished the chief business for which he had come into the world, and if he had not come down from the mount as Peter wished, we should *all* have perished, for the atonement could not have been completed. Peter had just before been hearing of great trials to be endured, and now that he was so happy on the mount, he hoped, like many, to reach the crown, without the cross or like others, to enjoy a heaven upon earth. With all this ignorance, there is something striking in his words, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Doubtless he felt it a solemn moment of communion, and, perhaps, hoped he had done with this world of sin and pollution. Every view of Christ's glory ought to be precious to us.

* 2 Peter i. 16. † Phil. iii. 21.

It is very good to be, where Christ is wont to meet and refresh us with his presence.

But Peter had many trials to endure before he reached the crown. "The tabernacle of God" is not yet with men, in the sense of triumph and glory. Even the Christian, who is the happiest person on earth, finds that there is some bitterness in all earthly sweets, and therefore he longs for that place where pleasure shall be pure and unmixed. Instead of building a resting-place for himself here, he lives as a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

But, though the disciples had so decisive a testimony that Jesus was God, both by his transfiguration, and by the voice from heaven, yet still they doubted. The Scribes said, and the Jews universally believed, that Elias was to come before the Messiah, and they thought he had not yet appeared. But our Lord explained the passage in the prophet Malachi,* by showing that it was fulfilled (at least partially) in John the Baptist, who came in the power and spirit of that Prophet. Like Elijah, he rebuked the sins of the people with great decision, and turned the hearts of the fathers to the children, in bringing both to repentance, and to a state of preparation for the Messiah. There is indeed a great day of the Lord coming, and the servants of God, in the spirit of Elijah, are preparing a people for the Lord. May we listen to the testimony,—"Behold he cometh," and welcome that day as the period of everlasting triumph.

CHAP. XVII. 14—27

CHRIST HEALETH THE LUNATIC, AND PAYETH TRIBUTE.

And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a *certain* man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove: and nothing shall be im-

* Chap. iv. 5.

possible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out by prayer and fasting. And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry. And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

No sooner had our Lord come down from the mount, than a pitiable object of distress presented itself to him—a man with a lunatic son—sorely vexed. The disciples had endeavoured to relieve him, but failed; upon which he came to Jesus—was received, and immediately cured. Observe the character of our blessed Lord, who, though just come down from a state of glory on the mount, was ready to receive the meanest and poorest who came to him; and contrast his power and love with the weakness and impotency even of his true disciples; they were still encompassed with unbelief, and, therefore, though he had given them power to cast out devils, they did not exercise faith in Christ's power, and the poor sufferer was left in all his misery. Let us pray for a real faith, which can overcome all difficulties, and remove mountains of sin and evil.

You may also see in those workings of distress which appeared in the father of this afflicted child when he came to Jesus, what your feelings would be if you felt for your soul as you ought, and knew that Jesus could heal you. You would, like this man, fall on your knees before him—you would cry, "Lord! have mercy"—you would tell him of your grief, and make particular mention of your own plague. Are your prayers cold and formal—not breathed from the heart—not forced from you by your own inward sense of want—not *prayed*, but *repeated*? Alas! you are a stranger to real prayer, and as Christ's people are a praying people, it is evident you are not one of them. Be in earnest about your soul—ask of the Lord Jesus to give you the spirit of prayer. If you have faith, you may say to the greatest obstacle before you, "remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

It was commanded by God in the Book of Exodus,* that

* Exod. xxx. 14, 15.

every man above the age of twenty years should pay a small tribute of about fifteen pence, for the use of the temple. The collectors of this tribute asked Peter whether his master would not pay it, and he hastily replied that he would: however Jesus corrected him, and in order to show his exemption from this tax, he appealed to the custom of the kings of the earth, which is, to take tribute from strangers or subjects, but not from their own children. Christ applied this to himself—"then," says he, "are the children free." It was God who imposed this tax for the use of the temple—his house. But Christ, being the SON OF GOD, and heir of all things, was therefore not obliged to pay this tribute. Nevertheless he yielded his right, lest his refusal might prejudice the people against his doctrine. For, though he was the Son of God—the king of heaven, yet he did not so appear to the Jews, and they might have thought that he was a teacher of rebellion. What a lesson this to his professed followers, not to give any ground of offence even from their conduct as citizens. With such an example before men, how can any refuse, with a clear conscience, to pay such taxes as church-rates. They are bound to give "tribute to whom tribute is due," without deciding, whether the tax is wisely appointed or not. But, behold our Lord's poverty: He who supplied the wants of others, had not sufficient to meet this occasion without performing a miracle. He directed Peter to cast a hook into the sea, and told him that in the mouth of the first fish which came up, he should find a piece of money sufficient for them both. Whether his omnipotence put the money there, or his omniscience knew it was there, it equally proved him to be the Almighty God.

NOTE on v. 24.—Trench has satisfactorily shewn that the tribute (δίδραχμα) was claimed in behalf of the temple, and not of the Roman Emperor; and as such Christ claimed exemption, although he did not use it.—See his notes on the Miracles, p. 369.

CHAP. XVIII. 1—14.

CHRIST WARNETH HIS DISCIPLES TO BE HUMBLE AND HARMLESS—TO AVOID OFFENCES, AND NOT TO DESPISE THE LITTLE ONES.

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and sat him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this

little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than have two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than have two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that *sheep*, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

It appears from the other Evangelists, that the disciples first disputed among themselves, "who should be the greatest,"* and then, according to St. Matthew, brought the question to our Lord; and so anxious were they about an exalted place in the temporal kingdom, which they thought our Lord was about to establish, that they disputed once more on this question at the last supper.† Pride and ambition still clung to them, and Christ, ever full of love and kindness, and anxious to remove these evil dispositions, preached the doctrine of humiliation, by setting a child in the midst of them, and telling them, that except they were converted, and became as little children, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven. From this we learn what sort of persons they are, for whom Christ expressed such a tender regard: they are those whom he calls "*little ones*," such as are little in their own eyes—have most of the humility of children, and like them, receive what they are taught with undisputing simplicity.‡ "Take heed," he says, "that ye offend not one of these little ones;" beware how you say or do any thing which may stop their progress in religion. None will do so, who are in that way themselves; but alas! the world abounds with nominal professors, who, by their sins and inconsistencies, bring disgrace on Christ's cause, and make those to stumble who are setting out in the Christian race—and even the world itself is

* Mark ix. 33. Luke ix. 46. † Luke xxii. 24. ‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

often stumbled by the sins of the outward disciples—they take occasion thereby to excuse their own iniquities, and to go on in their rebellion—hence there is a double woe—to those who excuse their iniquities from the inconsistencies of professors—and to those who throw obstacles in the way of men's turning to God. No passage in holy Scripture proves more clearly the excellency of the grace of humility—it is real greatness, when we are debased in our own eyes, and glory only in the Lord.

So far from our Lord selecting any chief or head among his apostles, "he pulleth down all their swelling arrogancy and teacheth, that the dignity of primacy is nothing to be desired, but that men ought to be willing to place themselves in the lowest rank: nothing is worse than pride, for it maketh men fools and mad."* One of the surest ways to avoid being an offence or stumbling-block to others, is to walk humbly with our God. We are then kept dependent on him for strength, and we are willing to minister to the lowest of Christ's members.

To despise the little ones of Christ's fold, or weak believers, is an offence against the Lord himself—let us therefore remember that their angels do always behold the face of God; they are under the special protection of the Most High, who employs his angels to minister to their wants,† and if you try to impede their progress, you are fighting against God, and it were better for you that a millstone were hanged about your neck, and that you were cast into the sea, than that you should continue to oppose the work of God. *You* are included when our Lord says, "except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." You must get a new heart, and a right spirit, and you will then be ranked among Christ's "little ones;" who have no will or wisdom of their own, but give themselves up entirely to be taught and guided by their Saviour, as children who have every thing to learn, and are incapable of choosing for themselves.

You may think this doctrine bears too hard upon flesh and blood; but He, who knows that if we were left to ourselves, we should run blindfolded into the way of destruction, has warned us beforehand, that we must of necessity, submit to his teaching, and break through all difficulties to follow it. Whatever, or whoever would endanger our soul's salvation, must be renounced. Relatives and former friends, evil habits, sins that stick close to us, all and every thing that would keep us from Christ, though

* Chrysostom, Hom. lix. in Matt † Psalm xxxiv. 7.

they be as dear to us as a right hand, or a right eye, must be totally abandoned. Think who calls you to this service! It is Jesus, who "came to seek and save that which was lost." His love ought therefore to constrain you to exercise constant self-denial, and his grace is always ready to help your infirmities, so that you may continue in his service with decision, and yet with liberty.

CHAP. XVIII. 15—35.

HOW WE ARE TO DEAL WITH AN OFFENDING BROTHER.—A PARABLE ON FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee, then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was mooved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desirest me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

We may observe from this portion of God's holy word, how different the Christian doctrine of forgiveness is, from the practice of the world. Man's evil heart induces him to expose the faults of others, and to indulge a revengeful temper; but both of these our Lord forbids. Instead of *exposing* unnecessarily, Christ recommends us *privately* to seek reconciliation with an offending brother, before a single individual is made acquainted with the circumstance. If this fails, let us take two or three friends who may either help to heal the breach, or may be witnesses of our kind intention; and if our adversary still continues implacable, let us tell the circumstance to the church, that is, to those who have the managing the public censures of the church, that they proceed against him accordingly. But if he disregard their censure and discipline, let him be regarded as one separated from the church and living in the heathen world. It is absurd to the last degree, to aim at proving the church's infallibility from this text, when it refers to a matter of offence from one member to another, and to the proper discipline to be used on such occasions, and not to the setting forth any articles of faith.

In order to shew his abhorrence of a revengeful or unforgiving temper, our Lord explained the duty of forgiveness by a parable which cannot be mistaken. It arose out of a question which Peter proposed to him—"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" The obvious meaning of our Lord's parable is, that instead of harbouring resentment, we should multiply our pardon seventy times seven, that is, as often as our brother manifests repentance; there is also a secret instruction conveyed, which points out the spirit and tendency of the Gospel, to pardon others from a sense of God's pardoning mercy in Christ. Man's sin is a great debt which he owes to God, and which none but Jesus can pay; and if Jesus *has* paid the ten thousand talents for any of us, how ready should we be to forgive the payment of an hundred pence, due by an offending brother.

We are not to infer from the conduct of the unforgiving servant, that we can be really pardoned by God, and yet live in malice; it is rather to shew how much more full of pity God is than man, and the necessity of cultivating the spirit of forgiveness from a sense of God's mercy to us.* The words, "I forgave thee *all* that debt," should ever present themselves to the Christian's mind, when anger is rising. Oh! what a mercy, that

* Eph. iv. 31, 32.

when God's justice would seize us, saying, "pay me that thou owest," we have one at hand who can discharge the debt for us, and set us eternally free. This is Jesus, an able and a willing Saviour. May he be *your* Saviour! then shall you know the sweetness of these words, "the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt." If it appears to you difficult to attain this constant self-restraint, and this meek, forgiving temper, you should remember that for all these things the Lord must be entreated. They are his gifts, and he must be asked to bestow them. How gracious is the promise, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." This is a great warrant for joining our supplications in the public worship of the house of God, for if the Lord hears one believer, when he seeks those things that are according to his will, how much more acceptably must the incense of united intercession ascend before the throne, in the name of the great Mediator. Oh! that we may all join in family worship; in the service of the church; in all faithful, united supplication, as those who expect to obtain their petitions, and to be filled with all that fulness of love, peace, and holiness, which the Lord is so ready to bestow.

CHAP. XIX.

WHEN DIVORCES ARE LAWFUL—THE YOUNG MAN'S QUESTION—THE DANGER OF RICHES.

And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan: And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there. The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning, made them male and female; And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save

they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*. Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence. And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is* God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness; Honour thy father and *thy* mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come *and* follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

In the portion of Scripture which has now been read, Christ confirms the law of marriage given to our first parents in Paradise, and declares it to be binding for life, except in the case of adultery: and accordingly, that case excepted, no divorces are allowed in Christian countries. But husbands and wives who are truly Christian, look beyond the mere letter of the law; they hear Christ saying that they are "one flesh," and consider the married state both as a sacred union of hearts, and a prepetual lively figure of the spiritual marriage and unity that is between Christ and his Church.* What peace would there be in families if all so received the command from his mouth, and endeavoured

* Eph. v. 29—33.

to live up to it for his sake! If we were thus faithful to him, and desired nothing so much as to please our Saviour and master, we should be like those "little children" whom he would not have forbidden to come unto him, but received with all possible marks of good will and affection, putting his hands upon them, and concerning whom he declares that of such is the kingdom of heaven. We may thus perceive both by his outward gesture and gracious words, that young children should be presented to the Lord, and made members of his Church by holy baptism,* whilst we may learn for our own good, that those only who are alike humble and teachable can belong to his kingdom of grace here, or be received into his kingdom of glory hereafter.

A certain young man is related to have come to Christ with this question: "Good master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What a vain hope—to purchase God's favour by his good works! If we could do so, then would Christ's sufferings be useless. This young man was conceited of his own righteousness, and seemed to think that his obedience would stand the test, and entitle him to the reward of eternal life. "All the commandments," says he, "have I kept from my youth up, what lack I yet?" This was a bold saying, and Christ, who knew how much he was mistaken, tried to convince him of his short-comings, by putting him to the test, whether he loved his neighbour *as* himself:—"If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow me." Observe, the young man asked, "what shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" thinking that he was in the right way, and not doubting but that Christ would think so too. Christ, therefore, who saw into the depth of his heart, took him on his own grounds, and told him that if he was resolved to *merit* happiness by his obedience, he must be so perfect in it as to refuse no command, how hard soever it might be to flesh and blood. You have heard how he shrank from the command, and chose to lose the favour of God, rather than part with his estate. Probably you will be ready to ask, must all do so? Is it strictly required of all to sell what they have, and give to the poor? No—not unless Christ was to lay such a particular injunction upon us: but *then* it would be our duty, (like Abraham, in offering up his only son,) to do as we are commanded, and we need not pretend to be the servants of Christ, if we are not ready to make any sacrifice which he may require of us.

* See the Baptismal Service for Infants in the Book of Common Prayer.

Two instructive lessons may be gathered from this narrative: first, the utter impossibility of *meriting* salvation by our own works. God requires, and cannot but require, perfect obedience from every soul of man, at all times, in thought, word, and deed. Do not foolishly say, "all this have I kept," for no human being since the fall of Adam ever did so. God *must* have perfect obedience, but because we have it not to offer, He imputes Christ's perfect obedience to believers; makes them perfect in him, and accepts his obedience as full payment in their behalf. This is God's method of saving sinners, and if you wish to be saved, renounce for ever the vain hope of purchasing salvation, and look by faith to the Lord Jesus, whose "righteousness is unto and upon all them that believe." *

The second point of instruction our Lord himself has noticed, viz. the danger which attends the possession of wealth. How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven! not merely *because* he is rich, for a rich man may be a Christian, as the example of many in the present day testifies; but because he allows his riches, and consequent worldly occupations, so to clog his mind, that religion is banished from his thoughts. Are you rich, pray against the evil which your riches are likely to bring upon you—pray that you may consider yourself as God's steward, and may employ your wealth in some of those various ways which present themselves, for the promotion of God's glory, and the spread of his Gospel on earth. Whether you will believe it or not, your riches were given you for this very purpose, and not to be squandered on self and vanity; so, take heed how you make use of God's property. Are you poor? Instead of repining at your lot, murmuring against God, and envying the rich, bless God for keeping this great difficulty out of the way of your salvation, and pray that you may "be content with such things as ye have." †

Peter and the rest of the apostles were yet too worldly; they spoke of having left *all* for Christ; but it was probably too much with a view to a better bargain, by their *temporal* advancement afterwards: when their minds were enlightened, they found they had a better possession than if Christ had been the earthly monarch they at first expected. It is "in the *regeneration* when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory," that we should look for the crown and triumph. *Now* Christ's kingdom is spiritual,—in the heart devoid of outward splendour, and

* Rom. iii. 22. † Heb. xiii. 5.

we should be ready to give up all things that would hinder our bearing the cross, and following the Saviour. May we have grace to be faithful and devoted to his service, and he will not deny us in the day of his coming.

NOTE v. 28.—παλιγγενεσία—"regeneration" not in the moral inward sense as Tit. iii. 5, but in the eternal sense, i. e. the manifestation of Messiah's kingdom when all things shall be delivered from corruption and restored to spiritual purity and splendour. See Robinson's Lexicon, citing Josephus.

CHAP. XX. 1—16.

THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a-day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive. So when even was come, the Lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the good man of the house, Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

THE pride of the human heart, and its enmity against the sovereignty of God, render it very difficult to convince men of the justice and goodness of his dispensations: yet nothing can be more certain, than that he is "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." The parable of the labourers in the vineyard was spoken for this purpose, to explain the dealings of God with men, and to vindicate him from the charge of injustice and partiality.

Whatever lessons we may personally draw from this parable,

(and they will be found truly valuable) there can be no doubt of our Lord's intention in making this comparison. He wished to remind the Jews of their peculiar mercies in being selected out of all the nations of the earth, that they might stand in covenant-relation to Jehovah, and enjoy all the privileges of the visible Church. They were early called to the service of the Lord, whilst other nations were left ignorant and unemployed. With them an agreement was made that they should "receive every man a penny,"* with the other four classes no stipulation was made—but only the promise, "whatsoever is right I will give you." We may suppose that our Lord refers to the Samaritans by the class of labourers hired at the third hour, (or our ninth hour,) with whom no covenant was made, yet they partook of the Jewish privileges.† The same may be asserted of those hired at the *sixth and ninth* hours, who may represent the proselytes, or those converted to the knowledge of the true God, by means of the Jews, without being fully incorporated with them. And the Gentiles, generally, seem to be set forth by those hired at the eleventh hour; when the legal dispensation was about to close, and the nations of the earth were to share in the privileges of the visible Church.

The penny then does not mean eternal life, which in every case is the gift—the free gift of God,—but the privilege of becoming the worshippers of the true God, which belonged to the Jews by a special covenant, but which others shared with them, partially under the Old Testament, by a grant of divine mercy, and which was fully opened to the Gentile nations by the dispensation of the Spirit. Our Lord foreseeing that the Jews would grudge this favour to the Gentiles, describes them murmuring at the dealings of the "good man" or master of the house, which our Lord justly rebukes by showing that they had received all that he covenanted to give them, whilst he was at liberty to bestow his own gifts as he would.‡

Our Lord draws from this parable some lessons very needful for us all to learn. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? is thine eye evil, because I am good?" We are often tempted to question the dealings of God; and, if we do not openly murmur, we are inclined to cherish hard thoughts of his ways, when

* Δηναριον, denarius,—equal to about sevenpence of our money,—an ample recompence for a day's labour in the eastern countries. So Tacitus, Denarius diurnum stipendium.

† 2 Kings xvii. 27, 28.

‡ See Greswell on the Parables. Vol. IV. p. 32.

they exceed our comprehension. How foolish is this! "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?"—How much better to repose in God's sovereignty, and to feel assured that he doeth all things well. He has a right to do what he will with his own. It is for us to receive all his gifts as the stream of pure mercy, and where we cannot fathom his counsels, to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

Again, our Lord says, "The last shall be first, and the first last, for many be called, but few chosen." Do we not see the truth of this before us continually? Those who have abundant opportunities, and seem to run well for a time, often grow weary in well-doing—backslide from the ways of the Lord, and eventually are cast into outward darkness; whilst they who have much to struggle against, and have a scanty supply, often outstrip the disciples that started in the race before them. Remember that you are *called* to be a professed follower of Christ. You were enlisted by baptism to rank amongst the soldiers of Jesus Christ. Do you fight manfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil? Do you shew that you are among the *chosen* of Christ, who have the grace of faithfulness, as well as the badge of Christianity?

CHAP. XX. 17—34.

THE REQUFST OF THE MOTHER OF JAMES AND JOHN—TWO BLIND MEN RECEIVE THEIR SIGHT.

And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify *him:* and the third day he shall rise again. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them,

and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way-side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David! And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David! And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

As the time of our blessed Lord's sufferings drew near, we find him going up to Jerusalem, which was to be the scene of them: and on the way he prepared the minds of his disciples for what they should witness, by foretelling his crucifixion and resurrection. One would think that this were enough to banish all vain hopes of his temporal kingdom, at that time; but still the disciples continued in the same mistake: and we are here told of two of them, James and John, who came to him with a request for precedence in his kingdom, and to make sure work of it, brought with them their mother to plead their cause. Our Lord inquired whether they could "drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism," *i. e.* whether they could share the same cup of sufferings, and fiery trial, with him. To which they replied that they were able. Alas! they knew but little at that time, of what his sufferings would be, or they would not have spoken so unadvisedly. How exceedingly bitter was that cup, which our Lord himself would have avoided, had it been the Father's will. Well for them—for us—for all men—that the Lord drank it to the very dregs, so far as atoning sufferings are concerned. It is true that we are called to suffer with Christ; for, as the head of the body was a man of sorrows, so must the members pass through deep waters to the land of rest. Our Lord, therefore, told them that they should indeed suffer for his sake, and accordingly they did—James having been put to death by Herod,* and John, though spared a violent death, was, after persecutions and sufferings, banished to the island of Patmos.† Still their request could not be granted; first, because no such kingdom as they hoped for, would, *at that time*, arrive; and secondly, because the places which they sought, would be filled up in Christ's *future* kingdom, by such persons as God would prepare for them.

* Acts xii. 2. † Rev. i. 9.

The other disciples being indignant at the request of James and John, most probably from selfish views, our Lord rebuked them by shewing that, though ambition and resentment were commonly found in the kingdoms of men, these ought not to be found in the church of God. There is very little of that pure zeal, which is displeased with the sins of others, merely out of hatred to sin and love to God. Even when rebuking others for pride, we should take care lest we fall into the same sin. Our Lord has decided that true greatness consists in humility, and that they are *highest* in his kingdom, who are *lowest* in their own estimation. Let us then have the example of the meek and lowly Saviour ever before us; who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The cross of Jesus, from whence flows all our salvation, should teach us to cast down all high thoughts of ourselves, and should restrain us from aspiring after earthly honours and exaltation. Let it be our chief ambition to carry the cross steadily and devotedly, in the footsteps of our blessed Master.

The narrative of the cure of two blind men is replete with instruction, they cried, as Jesus passed, but he seemed to disregard them. They cried again, and the multitude rebuked them. But they were in earnest about what they asked—would not be put off, and again they cried, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David;" nor did they cry in vain, for the Saviour stopped and healed them. Are your prayers of this description? or are you easily put off from them, by trifling circumstances, or by the voice of the worldly multitude? If so, you have little to expect from Jesus. His people strive, struggle, wrestle in prayer, and thus they show their earnestness. Try and copy their zeal, and as Jesus so often says to you in his Holy Word, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee,"—answer, "Lord, that my eyes may be opened," to see my own real state, and to see thee, the only true Saviour.

CHAP. XXI. 1—22.

CHRIST RIDETH INTO JERUSALEM—DRIVETH THE BUYERS AND SELLERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE—THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me. And if any

man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set *him* thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed *them* in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest! And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple: and he healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased; And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away. And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

AFTER the account of our Lord's birth, teaching, and miracles, we are now come, in the order of this Gospel, to his public entry into Jerusalem, where he was going to finish the great work for which he came into the world, and to perfect obedience by suffering death upon the cross for man's redemption. Before he arrived at Jerusalem, he sent on two disciples, and directed them where to find an ass's colt, on which he intended to ride; and truly did he give proof that it was "THE LORD" who had need of it, by describing so many particulars of persons, place, and situation, as Omniscience alone could have been aware of. Thus, in fulfilment of a prophecy, uttered above 500 years before, by the prophet Zechariah,* did the Saviour enter Jerusalem in humble triumph,

* Zech. ix. 9.

seated "upon a colt, the foal of an ass." Multitudes now came forth to meet him; they showed their joy, and honoured him by such methods as were used upon the accession of kings to the throne, or on the triumphal return of conquerers to their capital city: they spread their garments along the road, and on each side, branches of trees: they acknowledged him as the Messiah, and cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" This appearance of state which our Lord assumed, was intended to prefigure the real dignity which he shall yet enjoy, when he comes, as King, to sit upon the throne of David.*

But of what avail was this momentary expression of joy, when, within five days afterwards, many of the same multitude gave utterance to the feelings of their hearts, and cried, "Crucify him, crucify him." It is to be feared they still had hopes of temporal power from him, though his appearance so ill bespoke it, and that when every idea of this was gone, in the prospect of his speedy death, they then joined the popular cry against him. How many now-a-days resemble them: they would be religious if they could gain anything of earthly enjoyment by it, but when they are called to follow a crucified Master, to suffer persecution, and to stem the tide of popular outcry, their fair professions vanish, and they join the world in the abuse of Christ and his people. This portion of Scripture was written that you might judge yourselves by it, and that you might be led to cry, in sincerity, as the multitude did, feignedly, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and to say, with joy in your hearts, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord:" for what can it signify to you to hear of his coming with salvation to a lost world, if you are not seeking after it, and made partakers of it for yourselves? "When he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?" Can you answer the question from your own experience? have you not only heard of him by the hearing of your ear—but felt the pleasure of his Gospel? Do you enjoy the peace of God which his Gospel conveys to every true believer?

When arrived at Jerusalem, our Lord went straightway to the temple, and on the day following he entered it again, and drove from thence the buyers and sellers, who, under pretence of having animals ready for sacrifice, had turned the house of God into a public market. Be instructed by our Lord's conduct, as to the regard you should have for places more immediately set apart for God's worship and service. Let his house be a house of prayer to

* Luke i. 32, 33.

you, and when you enter there, think of nothing but the proper business of it. Leave your worldly thoughts behind you, leave your common conversation without the gates, and enter, as those should do who expect to meet the God of holiness in prayer, and to draw down his blessing on their souls. None will really value the privilege of prayer, but those into whose hearts Christ has entered by his Spirit, and expelled the unclean thoughts and desires that dwelt therein.

The anger of the chief priests and scribes was now excited when they heard even the children employed in praising Jesus, and crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Children will learn of those that are with them, either to curse and swear, or pray and praise. These children heard the song of praise, and echoed it. Even here was a prophecy fulfilled, for David had said in the 8th Psalm, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength."

The next morning, as our Lord returned from Bethany to Jerusalem, he sought fruit upon a fig-tree which he passed, but it proved to be barren, though its leaves gave promise that fruit might be expected. Upon this he cursed it, and the next day, as our Lord and the disciples passed that road, it was observed by them to be withered.* Their surprise was answered by an express declaration, that if their faith in his power were firm, they might perform greater things than this; and that all things, whatsoever they asked in prayer, believing, should be granted. Let us seek to have a share in so full and glorious a promise.

This barren fig-tree was an emblem of the Jewish nation, which professed the worship of the true God, and seemed to promise fruit; but when Christ came, he found nothing but the leaves of profession: they called "Abraham their father, but did not do the works of Abraham:" they therefore fell under his wrath, and we may now behold the Jewish nation, and say—"See how the fig-tree is withered." Let us beware, lest at the same time we pronounce our own doom. God expects fruit from each of us, and he may reasonably do so, for we have enjoyed the highest advantages: care and culture has been bestowed on us; planted within all the means of grace and ordinances of religion, our doom will be still more heavy than that of the Jews, if we produce nothing but the leaves of an empty profession. Judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the

* See Mark xi. 13, and Doddridge's Expositor on the phrase, "the time of figs was not yet." Section 149.

Lord; and if you have reason to apprehend the safety of your state, call to mind the word of the promise—"Whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." *We* cannot remove the mountain of an unconverted heart, but with God all things are possible: "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

NOTE v. 12.—*κολλυβιστής.* The "money changers" were occupied at the temple in changing the foreign coins and also the skekel, that the Jews might pay the half shekel as commanded in Exod. xxx. 15. They exacted a small fee called Kolbon, and carried on this exchange of money in the temple, under the plea of helping men to pay the tax of the temple.

CHAP. XXI. 23—46.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S AUTHORITY—THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS—OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*. When

the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

When the chief priests and elders of the people asked Jesus, "by what authority he did these things," viz. making a public entry into Jerusalem—receiving the acclamations of the people as the Messiah—and turning the buyers and sellers out of the temple; instead of giving them satisfaction on the point, and telling them plainly who he was, he evaded their question, by asking them another, which he knew they would not answer. And why did he so? Because he could read their hearts, and saw that their design was not to learn of him, but to ensnare him. Jesus knows what is in your hearts too. If you bow before him in mock humility, or draw near with your lips, while your heart is far from him, he will reject you: but if you be sincerely desirous of saving knowledge, he will meet you with his blessing.

The question which our Lord proposed, was concerning John the Baptist. If the Pharisees said that his ministry was of *human* authority, they were in danger of being stoned by the people, who highly valued John: If they acknowledged that he came by *divine* authority, then must they confess Jesus to be the Christ, for John testified of him that he was the Son of God. Thus were they embarrassed, and these great doctors chose rather to pretend ignorance, than to confess a truth which would condemn them. They said, "We cannot tell;" No—the truth was, they *would* not tell, for their conscience convicted them. Many there are who are more afraid of the *shame* of lying, than the *sin* of it; and therefore scruple not to tell a lie concerning their thoughts and intentions, or their remembering or forgetting of things, in which nobody can disprove them, when they would refuse to deny a fact, because others might convict them of an untruth. In such a case the fear of man is stronger than the fear of God.

Our Lord, then, by a parable, obliged these Pharisees to pass sentence on themselves. He represented the case of a father who had two sons—one professed obedience to him, but afterwards was undutiful; the other was at first undutiful, but afterwards became obedient. Thus the Scribes and Pharisees professed a great regard for the commands of God, but when Jesus came, they rejected him; while the publicans and harlots, who at first made no such profession, afterwards repented, and obeyed the Gospel. The Pharisees could not but own that the latter son was the more obedient of the two, and by this confession they were self-convicted. The whole human race are like children whom the Lord has brought up, but they have rebelled against him; only, some are more plausible and decent in disobedience, than others; yet their enmity may be deeper—their prejudice and pride may prompt them to reject the Gospel and even to scoff at its message. The open transgressor—without prejudice, is more hopeful than such opposers of the truth. And it often happens, that the more daring sinner is brought to repentance, and becomes the servant of God, while the decent formalist is hardened in pride and enmity to the Gospel.

The next parable which follows, is chiefly applicable to the Jewish Church. God, the owner of the Church—his vineyard, had sent prophet after prophet to instruct and admonish them; but the Jewish priests and rulers were enraged by these faithful monitors, and instead of repenting, and "doing works meet for repentance," they apprehended the servants of Jehovah, "beating one, and killing another." At last the Lord sent his well-beloved Son, hoping they would "reverence him;" but so far were they from doing so, that at the very time while Jesus was speaking, they were consulting together how they might put him to death, in order to secure their own authority and reputation, thus fulfilling the parable which Jesus was uttering. If you are a conscientious reader of the Scriptures, consider the parable which has been read, and ask if you are not concerned in it. The vineyard *then* was the Jewish church *—*now*, it is planted by God amongst the Gentiles, and put into a condition of bearing fruit. Our Lord speaks of taking the vineyard from the Jews, and giving it "to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." There is no *nation* in the world, which holds the pure doctrines of the Gospel so decidedly as our own; yet we have nothing to boast of, for all is of grace. Think, each of you who

* Isaiah v. 7.

hear this; has God done all that was necessary, and more than you could expect, to bring you to a fruit-bearing state, and is the day coming when he will look for fruit at your hands? Has he not sent his messengers, his holy prophets, his apostles to you, delivering all the will of God made known to them? Is not the book of the Scriptures, which you have in your hands, an account of what God has been doing in the world for the recovery of lost mankind? Is not the Lord Jesus Christ therein revealed to you as a Saviour to purge your sins with his blood—to bring your straying heart back to God—to make you a new creature, fit for glory? What effect, then, has all this had upon your souls? Is Christ precious to you? Have you fruit for him—the fruit of gratitude? Do you love his word, his day, his ordinances? If not, your greater advantages above others will turn to your greater condemnation.

NOTE v. 44 is thus paraphrased by Burkett.—"He that stumbles on the stone while Christ is here on earth, being offended at his doctrine, life and miracles, shall be broken by his fall upon it, as the person stoned is by the sharp stone which he falls upon. But he on whom this stone shall fall, when Christ is elevated to his throne of glory, shall be more violently shattered by it, as is the person stoned by the great stone as big as two men can lift, thrown down violently upon his breast."

CHAP. XXII. 1—22.

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER—THE WEDDING GARMENT—ON PAYING TRIBUTE.

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son: And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and *my* fatlings *are* killed, and all things *are* ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of *it*, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated *them* spitefully, and slew *them*. But when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are*

chosen. Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man;* for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, *ye* hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard *these words,* they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

THE kingdom of heaven, spoken of in this parable, represents the Gospel dispensation; for it cannot mean the kingdom after death, into which none will be admitted but such as have been made fit for it by the Holy Spirit. Of this visible kingdom, they are the subjects who profess to believe in Christ, to be governed by him, and to prepare for his coming. Whoever of you are in earnest about your souls, and anxious to understand the word of God, will ask such questions as these, concerning the parable just read;—Who is the king that invites? Who are invited? What is the marriage supper to which they are invited? And what is required in order to make them worthy guests? Each of these questions shall be answered, and try to think of yourself and your own case, as we proceed.

The king that invites is God, who, of his free and unmerited favour, looked down upon the starving condition of his creatures, and formed the plan of providing for their necessities. The invited are, first, and principally, the Jews, his own people; but when they not only refused the invitation, for worldly reasons, but persecuted and slew the messengers who were sent to them, command was given to send the message to all other nations of the earth, among whom are we, professing Christians. The marriage supper, to which we are invited, is the Gospel of Christ; nor are we bidden, merely to look on at the marriage of another, but we are each invited to become a party ourselves, that is, we are encouraged to join that spiritual church of believers, to which Christ is now, spiritually, and will hereafter, personally be united. Thus the church is called the spouse, and Christ the bridegroom. The great day of the nuptials will be at the close of this present period of time, when Christ shall come in glory, to establish his kingdom. This will be the marriage supper of the Lamb, when the Lord Jesus shall gather together all his true servants, as the bride adorned and prepared

for the day of manifest union.* God's message, inviting us to join this company of believers, has been delivered by the prophets and apostles, his messengers, and has been conveyed to us in that volume of inspired truth, the Bible. During the whole period of our life, God is inviting us, and one would think that a message so joyous, which reveals a way for the pardon of our sins, and our soul's eternal salvation, would be received with rapture, and embraced without hesitation. But, alas! what a picture of the deadening influence of sin is presented in that cold entertainment which Christ and his offers receive from man. Listen to the various excuses which are made: some plead their business and worldly employment, which they say will not give them time to think of religion; the country people have their farms to look after—the towns-people must attend to their shops—the rich are so immersed in pleasure, and the poor so distressed by want and care, that both, and all, beg to be excused from attending to their soul's salvation, as if they had no interest in the matter, and that to think for a moment on religion were a favour conferred on God. Oh! how shall such bewail in agony the time spent upon vanity which might have been otherwise profitably employed! What is time for, but a preparation for eternity? and shall the perishable body occupy all your attention, while the imperishable soul is neglected?

Let us next observe the dress in which we must be clothed to become worthy guests at this marriage feast. The man in the parable had not on a wedding garment. And why was he particularly to be blamed for this? Because it was the custom in those days and in that country, that whenever a king or nobleman invited persons to a feast, he should *give* a suitable dress to all who were bidden, and therefore, when this person came without one, it was a sure sign he had never asked for it. Just so does that king who invites us to the Gospel feast. We have no dress of our own in which to appear. "Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," but the Redeemer's righteousness is the wedding garment: it is that pure and spotless robe which can cover our deformities, and present us faultless in the presence of God. This wedding garment is to be had gratuitously. The king who invites us, will give it us freely if we ask. He will forgive our iniquities freely—he will justify us by his grace—he will sanctify us by the power of his Spirit, and thus prepare us for fellowship

* Rev. xix. 7, 8, 9.

here, and for glory hereafter. Do you wish to be thus ready when your Lord calls, and to be in that happy state that death can never overtake you unprepared? Jesus can make you so, if you will but ask him with sincerity in prayer; and without this, you, and all who appear at the bar of God, shall hear that awful sentence pronounced—"Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The latter part of this portion of Scripture informs us, that two opposite sects of the Jews combined for the purpose of entangling our Lord in his conversation. The Pharisees refused subjection to the Roman government; the Herodians were oppoed to them in this point, and by proposing the question whether tribute should be paid to Cæsar or not, they felt sure of entrapping our Lord, let him answer how he would; but it was not so easy a task as they imagined. Having obtained the coin in which tribute was paid, Jesus drew them to acknowledge that it bore Cæsar's image and name, and so he tacitly inferred, that Cæsar was the civil ruler to whom God had subjected them, and therefore, as they derived protection, and the benefits of magistracy from him, they were not only allowed, but required, to render him tribute; while at the same time, God, as the King of kings, demanded the first tribute of their honour and obedience.

Let us remember, then, that to keep back any lawful tribute—not to pay taxes or church rates—to use contraband goods—all these are different ways of "breaking the precept," "render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's;" whilst not being devoted to God in heart and life, is keeping back from Him his real due. Let us hearken to all the commands of God, and ask, Whose image does this command bear? whose authority is stamped upon it? and when we know that it is the authority of the eternal, omnipotent Jehovah, we should at once put ourselves in the way of obedience, and pray constantly and sincerely that his laws may be written on our hearts, and that our wills may be so conformed to his commands, that it may be our delight to obey them.

NOTE v. 12.—What is the wedding garment? Gregory says "Love and a new life:" so generally the Fathers. Leigh in his Annotations, replies, "The righteousness of Christ—imputed and inherent, i. e. all that constitutes the reality of a Christian." This seems preferable to confining it to Christ's imputed righteousness.

NOTE v. 17.—The Jewish writers taught, "Wherever the money of any king is current, there the inhabitants acknowledge that king to be their Lord."—*Maimonides.*

CHAP. XXII. 23—46.

ON THE RESURRECTION—CHRIST PROVES IT FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT—WHICH IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard *this*, they were astonished at his doctrine. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, *which was* a lawyer, asked *him a question*, tempting him, saying, Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The Son* of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any *man* from that day forth ask him any more *questions*.

THE Sadducees were a sect of the Jews, who denied a future state, and the resurrection of the body; and one of their objections, as we learn from this passage of Scripture, was, that they could not conceive, in the case of a woman having several husbands, how she could be the wife of them all, after death: grossly supposing that if there was a resurrection, all things would continue the same in a future state, as they are now. But after telling them that in the age to come they should neither "marry nor give in marriage," our Lord pointed to the source of their error, viz. their ignorance of the word of God; "Ye do err, not knowing

the Scriptures." And to what else is it to be attributed, but to ignorance, and neglect of the Bible, that so many, now, are as unconcerned about the future state of their souls, as if there was no existence beyond the grave? Are there none present to whom these words may be addressed, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures?" God has given his Holy Word to be "a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path," and if we studied that blessed volume more frequently—praying for the teaching of the Spirit to understand it, and regarding every word of it, as we would a voice speaking directly from heaven, it would give a new turn to our thoughts and desires, it would put us in the way of salvation, by teaching us to know ourselves, and by revealing that Saviour, "whom to know is life eternal."

Our Lord next proves the doctrine of a future state and resurrection, from those Scriptures which the Sadducees acknowledged, but which they had neglected. In the third chapter of Exodus, and sixth verse, God says, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob:" but at the time God spoke these words, the Patriarchs had long been dead. How could he be their God *at that time*, if they had ceased to exist at death? Besides, as man's *name* is given to his *body*, how could God be the God of Abraham, if his body was not to rise again?

The Sadducees being thus put to silence by Christ, the Pharisees again encounter him, and send unto him a Lawyer, (that is, one who expounded the law of Moses,) to question him. On his asking our Lord, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" he was answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;" and the next important commandment, and closely allied to this, is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Let us first consider what is implied in loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. That person loves God with all the *heart*, who loves nothing in comparison of him—who is ready to give up, do, or suffer any thing in order to please and glorify him: that person loves God with *all his soul*, (or life), who is ready to part with life for his sake, to endure persecution, and be deprived of all kinds of comfort rather than dishonour him: that person loves God with all his *strength*, who exerts all the powers of his body and soul, in the service of God, who employs in his service all his talents and his influence: and, lastly, that person loves God with all his *mind*, who seeks above all other things, to know God and his holy will, as revealed in the Scriptures;

in a word, who sees God in all things, thinks of him at all times, who begins, continues, and ends all his actions to the glory of his name. This, then, is the person who loves God with all his heart, life, strength and mind. O happy state! far beyond any description. As these words which have now been read, come from the Saviour's mouth, let us pause, and consider whether *we* feel such love as this. The world consists of two classes only, those who love God, and those who love him not; to which of these do we belong? it is an awful question, but let us not put it from us; no, let us rather look to the Saviour, and pray him of his infinite mercy to kindle the holy fire of love within us, if it be not there already. The love of our neighbour springs from love to God as its source, and consists in loving him *as* ourselves, not *above* or *before*, for this is more than God expects, whose order is, First, that we should delight in him as our supreme good, then attend to ourselves, and then love our neighbour *as* ourselves. We should desire to share with others all the blessings we enjoy, and to relieve them from all the miseries which we dread falling on ourselves.

We should each consider that question which our Lord proposed to the Pharisees, as addressed to ourselves—"What think ye of Christ?" answer it to yourselves, as in the presence of God. Is he altogether glorious in your eyes, and precious to your hearts? Do you build upon him as your sole and only Saviour, renouncing all other dependances! According to your practical judgment in these matters, your character and conduct will be eventually regulated.

CHAP. XXIII. 1—22.

HOW FAR TO FOLLOW THE SCRIBES—THEIR PRIDE AND HYPOCRISY—CHRIST DENOUNCES WOES AGAINST THEM.

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye

called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, *ye* blind guides! which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. *Ye* fools, and blind! for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. *Ye* fools, and blind! for whether *is* greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso, therefore, shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

THE words spoken in this chapter were addressed by our Lord "to the multitude" as well as to the disciples, for all were concerned in hearing what regard was to be paid to the instruction of the Scribes and Pharisees. They "sat in Moses's seat;" that is, they were the authorised teachers, and expounders of the law of Moses. Whatever, therefore, they produced out of the Scriptures—the book of Moses, the people ought to attend to, and practise; but whenever they transgressed the commands of God, either by example, or by substituting traditions in their place, then were the people commanded by Jesus to disregard them.* Just so is the case now, between the people and the ministers of the church. The office of a minister is to explain, enforce, and apply the doctrines contained in the word of God; and if at any time he oversteps his authority, by preaching any thing contrary to the Bible, the people have Christ's authority for not following his instruction. Yet the bad character of duly ordained ministers does not take away the effect of Christ's ordinance, for "the sacraments are effectual, because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men." †

These Jewish teachers erred, grievously, in many particulars. Thus they erred in putting a literal construction upon portions of Scripture which were of spiritual import. In the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, God had desired that his word should be

* Matt. xvi. 6—12. † Article XXVI. of the Church of England.

bound upon their hands, and placed as "frontlets between their eyes,"—thereby meaning, that his law should be continually in their hands, to dispense it around, and that the fruits of it should be manifest in their outward behaviour, so that by observing them, one might say—'there is a man who fears God.' But instead of this, the Pharisees literally made use of parchment, inscribed with texts from the law, which they fastened to their foreheads, and wrists: these were called phylacteries, or, *preservatives*, being superstitiously considered as charms to protect them from danger; all this was done for mere show, to be seen of men.* For the same purpose, and to gratify pride, they delighted to intrude into the chief seats, to be made conspicuous; they loved to be addressed with respect in places of public resort, as men of piety and talent, under the appellation of Rabbi and Father, by which they wished the common people to receive their direction with blind obedience. In this sense we are to call no man Father, for God alone can demand such implicit obedience; we must regard no man as our Rabbi, or Master, so that we should follow his word without reference to the oracles of God. We are indeed to reverence our parents, rulers, and pastors, but not to exalt any into the place of God's authority. Our Lord would have us know that all such conduct was directly opposed to the spirit of the Scriptures. He who is consistently a disciple of Christ, loves privacy for his devotion, and delights most to commune with his Father in those places where no human eye follows him. He is lowly in his own estimation, and therefore makes choice of the lowest places, in honour preferring others to himself.

The anger with which our Lord viewed the conduct of the Pharisees, may be estimated by the forcible language in which he condemned them: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" and woe unto all other ministers, who, like them, are appointed to guide men into the way of salvation, and yet point not, solely, to Christ, as the way of access to the Father. Woe to all who make religion a mask or pretext to obtain earthly power and riches—who multiply prayers by the dozen, and think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Alas! that man should so mistake the character of God, as to suppose that any outward ceremony, however solemn or imposing—any

* The phylactries used by the Jews for some centuries past, are small cases of parchments, with divisions, into which are placed sentences or chapters of Scripture, carefully written on strips of parchment. They tie them on their arm morning and evening, when they say their prayers, and hence they are called Tephlim or prayers.—See Lamy and Lightfoot.

number of prayers, however regularly repeated, could supply the place of that inward affection of the *heart*, which God invariably demands. "God is a spirit, and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."

In several other particulars the conduct of the Pharisees came under our Lord's censure. They were assiduous in making proselytes, not from a desire of promoting the glory of God, but in order to strengthen their party, and to advance their reputation. They vainly taught the people, that an oath sworn by the gold or the sacrifices which passed through their hands, was more binding, than if they swore "by the temple," or "the altar;" whereas they ought first to have said to them, "swear not at all," and next they should have explained, that an oath "by the altar," included the gift or sacrifice upon it, and an oath "by the temple" included the God whose typical residence it was, as well as the gold that was there consecrated to him. But this would not serve their purpose. Let us all remember that the eye of God ever looks at the *heart* of man, and let the work we are engaged in be of ever so charitable a nature, or perfect in the view of our fellow-creatures, yet if it spring not from gratitude, and from the holy motive of bringing glory to God, that work is not the genuine fruit of the Spirit, and cannot be pleasing in the sight of God.

CHAP. XXIII. 23—39.

CHRIST CONTINUES TO DENOUNCE THE HYPOCRISY OF THE PHARISEES—HE WEEPS OVER JERUSALEM.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. *Ye* blind guides! which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. *Thou* blind Pharisee! cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which

killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. *Ye* serpents, *ye* generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens unto *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

It is remarkable what a difference our blessed Lord made between the people and their unfaithful ministers, on every occasion when he addressed them. To the people he never spoke but in tender and affectionate language, as one who pitied, and felt for their wants. But when speaking to those who had the office of the people's guides, and yet led them from the scriptures, he showed his abhorrence of their conduct, by the harshness of his expressions, calling them "blind Pharisees," "hypocrites," and "a generation of vipers," who could not escape the damnation of hell. How much they deserved such names, is evident from those instances of their character and conduct, here related. They were scrupulous in minute exteriors, but very remiss in important matters: they professed to be so tender in their consciences, that they paid tithe even of garden herbs, mint, anise, and such like, while they totally omitted many weighty matters of the law. "They strained at a gnat," or, strained a small insect out of what they were going to drink, lest it should choke them, and yet they could, on occasion, "swallow a camel." This was a proverb, to denote that the sins they committed were as much larger than those which they scrupled at, as a camel is larger than an insect.

When we hear Christ, throughout this chapter, censuring the Scribes and Pharisees with such severity of expression, we should set ourselves to examine whether there is any thing similar in *our* doctrine and practice, which will assuredly call down the same reproof. The Pharisee lies deep within us all, by nature; and a decent outside is, for the most part, the sum total of an unconverted man's religion. But Christ has a piercing eye, and as he cannot be deceived, so he will not be put off with a form. What will your outward covering avail in that day, when "the Lord

Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know him not?" See, then, the necessity for "a new heart," "a clean heart," a changed heart, to purify the source of your words and actions, and make you truly and sincerely, *in secret*, what now, perhaps, you only *appear* to be in public.

How exactly similar are all unconverted men in every age of the world! be they Jews or professing Christians, their ideas and expressions are alike. This is strikingly evident from the faults with which the Pharisees were charged, and which are to be found in nominal Christians of the present day: our Lord says, they built the sepulchres of those prophets whom their fathers had killed—meaning, that they seemed to condemn the act of their fathers, by reverencing the memory of the departed prophets; but what did this profession avail, when they themselves were going to crucify him whom the prophets foretold? How many are there now to be found, who would consider it an insult to be told that they did not reverence the memory, and love the character of St. Paul, St. John, or St. Peter, who yet cannot endure those ministers who preach the same doctrines as they did, and who endeavour to conform to their holiness of life!

After the censures pronounced upon the Pharisees, our Lord proceeds with great tenderness to declare the miseries which the inhabitants of Jerusalem were about to bring on themselves, by crucifying him, the Lord of Glory. He had, for ages, by his prophets, repeatedly invited the Jews to take shelter under the shadow of his wings, and afterwards he invited them himself, by his personal ministry, but they "would not come;" therefore the ruin of their city and nation was determined; their temple should soon be levelled to the ground, and they themselves cast out of the church, till they became willing to submit to him who "cometh in the name of the Lord." In the meantime, he foresaw the storm of divine wrath that was about to burst on this ungrateful city—how Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles, and what tremendous sufferings the people were about to endure at the approaching siege; and he who had such deep sympathy for human sorrow, wept over the devoted city, and poured out his tears for them who would soon fill up the measure of their iniquity by shedding his precious blood. All nature does not afford a more apt emblem of the Saviour's love, and faithful care of his redeemed people, than that which is here presented. Christ now speaks to *us*, and says, "How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings"—shall he be obliged to finish the sentence and

say,—"*and ye would not?*" Have all his invitations and precious promises been disregarded? Has the Gospel been preached to you in vain? Pause, sinner, pause, and think whom you are slighting—Jehovah Jesus, who now speaks in endearing language, but who will yet speak in terror and dismay, to all who are more willing to follow the world, than to become his disciples. Your day is not yet closed—he still invites you. Ask him to give you the inclination—to make you willing; then shall he "cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

NOTE on v. 35.—It has been much controverted what Zacharias is meant. Most writers point out the prophet mentioned in 2 Chron. xxiv. 19, 20 The difficulty arising from his being called the son of Jehoiada instead of as here, Barachias, may be explained by the fact, that the Jews had often two names.

CHAP. XXIV. 1—28.

CHRIST FORETELLETH THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE—WHAT, AND HOW GREAT CALAMITIES SHOULD BEFAL THE JEWS.

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to *him*, for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For

then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; believe *it* not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: Behold, *he is* in the secret chambers; believe *it* not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

WERE there no other evidence of the divine mission of the Lord Jesus, than that which this chapter affords, it ought to be more than sufficient to convince the most incredulous. Who, but a person conscious of speaking with divine authority, would have ventured to deliver such predictions as are here contained? Who, but God, could have foretold that the Jewish temple, then in the height of splendour, and constructed with the greatest ability, should, within that present generation, be so completely destroyed, that "one stone should not be left upon another?" And yet, unlikely as all this appeared to be, it was most exactly accomplished. Jerusalem was taken by the Romans;—Titus, the Roman general, desired exceedingly to save the temple, but the rage of the soldiers, and the infatuation of the Jews were such, that he was unable to accomplish his desire, and the words of Christ were fulfilled—"the abomination of desolation" (viz. the Roman standard,) "spoken of by Daniel the prophet," was erected "in the holy place" *—the temple was repeatedly set on fire, contrary to the strict commands of Titus; and after the flames had devoured all that could yield to their influence, the remainder of the structure was demolished, and the materials removed, in order to search for the treasure that was buried under its ruins, so that, in the event, the very foundations were subverted; the ground on which it stood was actually ploughed up, and our Lord's prophecy received an exact and literal accomplishment in less than forty years after it was uttered.† Nor were his prophecies of ruin to his enemies, less remarkable than those of mercy to his true followers. Certain signs were foretold, which should mark the approach of the calamities, and by these the Christians in Jerusalem were warned to make their

* Dan. ix. 27.

† See the independent testimony of Josephus.—Wars of the Jews, lib. vi. and vii. clearly proving that this word of prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.

escape; this part of our Lord's prophecy was also fulfilled—the signs did happen—the Christians took warning by them, and fled, some to a neighbouring village called Pella, others to Mount Lebanon, and thereby preserved their lives.

On hearing these awful predictions, the disciples were excited to ask further information from Christ, respecting their accomplishment; they therefore proposed three questions:—"When shall these things be? What shall be the sign of thy coming? And of the end of the world?" And though our Lord's answers to each of these questions may be traced in the chapter, yet did he seem rather to check the curiosity of the disciples, than to afford information intelligible to them at the time. He speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem as the time of his coming, but has so interwoven that event with the awful prediction of his yet *future* coming, that the circumstances relating to each are difficult of separation. However, he warns the disciples to beware of those who should come in his name—false Christs, who should deceive the Jews that were still in expectation of the Messiah; and he also tells them that the love of many would then be chilled by the persecution to which they should be exposed.

Forasmuch as Jerusalem's destruction was not only a forerunner, but a figure of Christ's coming to judge apostate Christendom, we may take much of what has been said as applicable to ourselves. Christ says, that before the end shall come, his Gospel is to be preached among all nations, not for their general conversion, but "*for a witness*" unto them, and for the gathering of his elect from among them: * so that we are to expect not the universal reception of the Gospel, but the calling out a body of professed disciples of Christ, before the second advent and reign of the Lord Jesus.

It appears that false Christs arose at the period of Jerusalem's siege, and deceived many; and that antichrist will in like manner, at "the time of the end," persuade men to follow after other Christs, or make them think the true Christ has come, but that he is in some secret place,—the faithful however will not follow them, because they know that Christ's coming will be bright and manifest, like the lightning itself.† We should take heed that no man deceive us, by preaching any other Christ, or any other

* Acts xv. 14, 17.

† Hence the Saints are compared to the eagles flying to the carcase,—who find it out with wonderful sagacity. So the saints will be all drawn to one place, when they see the splendour of the Lord's coming.—Leigh's Annotations, p. 65.

Gospel than that contained in his Holy Word. St. Paul says, "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed;"* and cursed, in like manner, are those who allow themselves to be deceived and seduced. If any of us cling to aught but the righteousness of the Son of God, as the sole ground of acceptance, or look to any other mediator between God and man, but only the Lord Jesus, we are deceiving ourselves, and laying up wrath in store against the judgment of the great day. Let those of us who are Christians, be excited to prayer and watchfulness, for fearful times will close the present dispensation. Persecution tends to increase the love of Christ's true followers, while it blows *out* the spark of mere profession. If the flame of love be at all kindled within us, the more the anger of the world storms upon us, the brighter will that flame be exhibited. Never did the Church of Christ flourish so well as in the days of adversity; and the experience of every individual of that church is just the same; for in every season of outward trial, Christians have less confidence in themselves, and are oftener with their Father in secret; because less dependant on the arm of flesh. Are any of us suffering under any persecution, mockery, and ridicule, for the sake of Christ? let us not be turned aside by these things, nor let our love wax cold; the Saviour has promised that "as our day is, so shall our strength be," and "he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

While we meditate on the extraordinary prophecies in this chapter, and look upon their accomplishment as so many infallible proofs of the truth of the Christian religion, let us apply the whole to ourselves, by considering the events foretold, as typical of far more important transactions. So sure as the words of Christ were accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem, so sure shall unconverted sinners, among the Gentiles, meet an awful doom, at the second coming of the Lord Jesus; and as sure as the Christians at Jerusalem escaped that ruin, by marking the signals of its approach—coming out from the unbelieving Jews, and taking refuge in the neighbouring towns, so sure shall all who take warning by what Christ now tells them—who come out from the world, and fly to him as their only refuge and defence—be saved, when awful ruin shall fall upon the ungodly at Christ's second coming, and when eternal destruction shall finally overtake them.

* Gal. i. 8.

CHAP. XXIV. 29—51.

THE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING—THE WICKED AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS COMPARED.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not, until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite *his* fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Our Saviour goes on, to set forth the calamities that should befal the Jewish nation, immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem. So entire was the subversion of their ecclesiastical and civil state, that it may be metaphorically represented by the sun, moon, and stars, losing their light, and all the heavenly bodies being dissolved: or there may be remarkable signs in the heavenly bodies,—so great a concussion that the stars may ap-

pear to fall, whilst the sun and moon may refuse to give their light. "Then," says our Lord, "shall the tribes of the earth mourn;" that is, they shall lament when they see the tokens, and feel the weight of Christ's terrible indignation. The destruction of Jerusalem is certainly a type of that great day of the Lord for which the church waits; and hence though these words, as the former part, has reference to Jewish calamities, yet their final accomplishment can only take place at the second advent of the Lord Jesus. For this we are taught to be prepared by the certainty of its approach, and all ages of the church are bound to wait for the returning master—especially as the promised signs and events will take place in a short space of time—as in the type, so in the antitype—they will be fulfilled in one generation.*

"The *sign* of the Son of man's appearing," seems to refer either to some appearance of glory, previous to his actual manifestation; or to the bright splendour that shall encompass him in the day of his coming. We are not to confound this with the signs of his approaching advent,—which may be faintly commencing in our day, but which shall be so manifest, when they really take place, that all the true people of God shall lift up their head, for their final redemption shall then draw nigh. Let us then give these signs their proper place,—they are not to teach the doctrine, but to quicken expectation,—like the budding forth of the trees they will proclaim the approach of the church's eternal summer; and certainly many signs have happened in our day that tend to beget the hope of a full budding-forth of the fig-tree. If, for example, we take the sun, and moon, and stars, as symbolic of civil and ecclesiastical powers, we must conclude that few ages, if any, have witnessed the same spirit of rebellion or opposition to the constituted powers. Other signs might be mentioned, but these may tend to quicken us in the expectation of that blessed day.

Let us observe how differently the thoughtless world and the church of God regard that day. The former are occupied about many things, but utterly careless about the day of the Lord,—and this fatal sleep will hold thousands, called Christians, until the sound of the archangel's trumpet. Like the people in Noah's and Lot's day, they will be found eating and drinking—marrying and giving in marriage—engaged either in sinful pursuits or

* "This generation shall not pass away," &c. verse 34, ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη,—"this very generation," viz. in which the signs begin, in the same they shall be perfected—as with Jerusalem, so with the last period.

in lawful ones, without any reference to eternity: and at last the flood of God's wrath will overwhelm them with sudden destruction. Again, our Lord compares all false professors to the evil servant, who says in his heart, "my Lord delayeth his coming." They either encourage divisions in the outward church, or sink into apathy and sensual indulgence. This will be the state of the world when Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven. He will find the worldling occupied in earthly things,—the professed Church too slothful or miserably divided, and only a few devoted servants waiting with their lamps trimmed for their returning Master. Surely this passage shews clearly that the victory of truth and righteousness will not occur in all its fulness, until the advent of Christ. In a word, it clearly proves that the kingdoms of this world shall not be converted to him before his coming.

How different will be our condition if we are true believers: —we shall regard ourselves as the servants of the best of masters—who has placed us here to live, not for self, but for the glory of God and the good of men, and we shall feel it a real privilege to do any thing in his service. Instead of dreading his return, we shall joyfully repeat the words—"Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." We shall welcome his approach; and at last hear his approving voice; we shall reign with him when all his saints arise to meet him, and when his glorious kingdom shall be made manifest. May God impress these realities on our hearts, so that we may be found with the glorified church in the day of final blessedness.

CHAP. XXV. 1—13.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so;* lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to

us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

WE may consider this chapter as one of our Lord's last legacies to the world, containing as it does, his instructions delivered but three days before his death. His design in the parable of the ten virgins cannot be mistaken. He himself tells us, that it was spoken to make us watchful for his second coming. The circumstances of the parable are taken from the custom of the Jews, in celebrating nuptials. The bridegroom used to go in the evening to fetch home his bride by the light of lamps; these were carried by bride-maids, and when arrived at his house, they partook of the marriage supper which had been prepared. Christ is the bridegroom of the Church; true believers of all ages of the Church form the mystical bride, whilst those who are the members of the *visible* Church are represented by the ten virgins.

The parable sets forth the *preparation* of the nuptials, rather than gives any account of the marriage supper, and therefore we are called to view true believers in a double character; *now*, as holding the lamp of profession, and joined to a society called the visible church, part of which is sincere, and a part proving unfaithful; whereas when the Lord shall come, believers will be called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and form the Lamb's wife, and all insincere professors shall be cast out. Of the ten virgins mentioned, five were wise, and five were foolish. We must not, however, strain the parable, and suppose that in the professing Church of Christ there is an equal number of righteous and unrighteous. Alas! experience, and the word of God, both testify the contrary;—"Wide is the gate that leadeth to destruction, and *many* there be that go in thereat;"—"Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it." Blessed be God these few—this "little flock," are daily increasing.

Observe, now, the difference between true religion and a mere outward profession.—"The foolish virgins took their lamps, and took no oil with them." What a useless thing is a lamp without oil! it may be highly ornamented and look beautiful outside, but, still, it is perfectly *useless*. All formal professors are like these foolish virgins; they have the lamp of profession in their hands—they have the appearance of being ready—they fancy they are ready, forgetting that the lamp

without the oil—the outward means, without the inward grace, is useless. "But the wise took oil in their vessels, with their lamps." They not only had oil in their lamps, but had a supply besides, to feed them as occasion required. Here is a picture of a true Christian. He has been made wise unto salvation—the Spirit of God dwells within him—by constant prayer he draws down fresh supplies for himself and gives light to those around him. Oil is the life of the lamp—the Spirit of God is the life of the Christian. He infuses the spirit of watchfulness, sobriety and prayer, which are distinctive features of the true Christian. "While the bridegroom tarried, *all* slumbered and slept." This describes the state which Christ knew that men would be in, before his second coming; and it is just the state that the world is in, *at the present time.** The summons *has* gone forth, and is now proclaimed by many of the Lord's watchful heralds—"Behold the bridgroom cometh:" but even "the wise virgins"—the Church of Christ—are still inclined to slumber. Let those who read, be warned, for surely the bridegroom cometh *quickly.*

"Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. Observe, they are all represented, to the last, as intending to meet the bridegroom, but the foolish knew not how utterly unprovided they were. This hour of the bridegroom's coming was the time of separation between the foolish and the wise. Consider the distress and dismay of the former; their lamps had gone out; the wick that had blazed for a moment, was now burned out, and what made their case more dismal, was, that they had no time then to procure the oil which they needed.† "The foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil:" foolish indeed are they who suppose that one sinner can impart grace to another, or that those who are wholly dependant on Christ for salvation, have any superabundant works, to hand over for the benefit of others. "The wise answered, saying, Not, so, lest there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." They did go, but it was then too late, for before they returned from their search, the door was shut, and they were excluded. What a picture, this,

* Greswell supposes the *sleep* to be the repose of the body in the grave, between death and the resurrection. Whether he be correct or not in this view, may be a matter of discussion, but his dissertation on this parable throws great light on its design and tendency. See vol. v. p. 197, &c.

† "In many parts of the east, and particularly in the Indies, instead of torches and flambeaux, they carry a pot of oil in one hand, and a lamp full of oily rags in the other."—HARMER.

of such persons as die in false security, and who are only aroused to a sense of their real state and danger, by the sound of the last trumpet; they supplicate mercy from Christ, but he is then a Judge and not a Saviour; the hour of mercy is past, and they cry in vain." They that were ready went in, and the door was shut:" And who are they that are ready? Such as are "born again," by the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit—are made new creatures in Christ Jesus, and walk through this world, only with a view to eternity, doing all things to the glory of God. Recollect that the foolish virgins put themselves in company with the wise, and expected to enter in with them to the marriage—so may you. They had a form of preparation—They came boldly to the door with these words, "Lord, Lord, open to us,"—so may you, and yet, like them, you shall be excluded with these heart-breaking words, "I never knew you," except you are now made ready, and prepared, by the effectual working of the Spirit of God. And thus our Lord applies the whole parable, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Lord, teach us to trim our lamps, enable us to wait for thy coming in power and glory, as those that long for their chief joy.

NOTE v. 3.—When it is said, that the foolish virgins "took no oil with them," it means, as a supply above and beyond the first lighting the lamp. This supply was needful for a season of watchfulness, and was the test of sincerity.

CHAP. XXV. 14—46.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS—CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

For *the kingdom of heaven is* as a man travelling into a far country, *who* called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made *them* other five talents. And likewise he that *had received* two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two

other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, *there* thou hast *that is* thine. His lord answered and said unto him, *Thou* wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and *then* at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give *it* unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee?* or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee?* Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

THE man in the parable who travelled into a far country, and afterwards returned, represents the Lord Jesus, who has been absent for a long season, but who will shortly return to take an account of the goods intrusted to our care. It is important for us continually to bear in mind, that we are all the servants of the most high God, and are accountable to him for the proper use of the different talents intrusted to us. God distributes these in such measure as he thinks best. Influence, situation, riches, learning, health, hearing, speaking; and above all,

the word of God, are talents given in different proportions amongst us, and these we are to use in the service and to the glory of our Lord and Master. The poorest amongst us has some talent which he can employ in promoting the glory of God, if his heart be inclined to it. When a man becomes a true Christian, all the talents which were before wasted, are then employed in the service of God; his time, his money, his strength of body and mind. Let us reflect that God considers every thing which we possess as *wasted*, if it be not in some way employed in his service. Observe too, that the person in the parable who received but one talent, is not charged with stealing his master's property. He gave back what he received, yet was he guilty for not improving it. He "hid his Lord's money;" he did this to keep it *safe*, as he thought, but he was punished for keeping it *idle*. Had it been his own, he might have done as he pleased; but whatever abilities and advantages we have, they are not our own; we are but stewards of them, and must give account to our Lord, whose goods they are. Taking this view of the subject, how many unprofitable servants are to be found amongst us, who think of little else than how they shall eat, drink, and be merry, as if their goods were their own, and as if no account should be rendered to that God, whose stewards they are. Let such seriously reflect on these solemn words: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness;" and let those who love the Lord Jesus, be diligent to improve their talents more carefully, and thus at last they shall hear those blessed words addressed to themselves—"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."*

The remaining part of this chapter refers to the period when Christ shall sit on his throne of judgment, and refers more especially to his final sentence on those who have had the light of revelation. It gives us a very solemn idea of the division which he will make in that day between true and false professors. There is a mixture at present in the world, of righteous and unrighteous, yet then will there be a separation, and it shall be manifest who were the true servants of Christ, and who were not. The righteous being placed at the right hand, are first addressed with an affectionate voice: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation

* On this invitation, Leighton strikingly remarks, "It is but little we can receive here, some drops of joy that enter into *us*, but there *we* shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness."—See Trench, who cites more to the same effect in his notes on the parables.

of the world." This word "inheritance," is calculated to give the most solid comfort to the heirs of salvation. They have a right to it, not by virtue of the works afterwards mentioned, (as some vainly suppose,) for it is said to have been "prepared for them" before they ever were born, or did the works. It is by virtue of free grace that they are made "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The Saviour is then represented as declaring, before the world, the fruits which their faith and love produced; but so far from attaching any merit to their works, the righteous would not have had them mentioned; they are amazed to think that the Saviour should notice such poor mean services as their's; they are sensible how much of imperfection was mixed with their holiest duties, hence their language is—"Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?" But the Lord shall answer, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The benevolence extended towards Christ's people, shewed their love to him, and instead of being the *cause* why he should love them, it was an *evidence* of the love which they had for him.

Awful and solemn is the Judge's denunciation, or sentence, to those on his left hand, "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." They had departed from him, and desired not his ways, in their lifetime—now he makes them depart from his presence for ever. They had no faith, and therefore produced no fruits of faith. It is very remarkable that our Lord speaks nothing of sins *committed;* not that the commission of sins will be overlooked, or left unpunished, but in order to show that what men think least of, viz. sins of *omission*, sufficiently stamp their character, and bring them in guilty before God. They are charged with the want of that evidence of faith, which the righteous produced. And here let it be remarked, that the persons who do the most works, are the last to glory in them; while, on the contrary, they who do the least, are inclined to glory the most. Those persons who had done nothing, are yet amazed when charged with neglect. What blindness is there in the heart of man, that he cannot know his own character! Many live and die in utter ignorance of themselves—destitute of that faith that worketh by love, and therefore, of all the fruits of holiness. Are we bringing forth the fruits of faith in our lives; and if not, can we imagine that we have faith? This chapter proves that such cannot be. Faith will work wherever it exists. Do you wish to bring forth these fruits of holiness? Ask the Lord Jesus to give you *faith*, and the works will inevitably fol-

low; but it would be as idle to expect to produce these works before faith is bestowed on you, as to hope to reap corn in your field, before the seed is sown.

One observation more demands our attention: "The righteous inherit the kingdom *prepared for them* from the foundation of the world"—the unrighteous are sent to a place, "prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell was prepared for the devil: but when men do the deeds of the devil, and follow his ways, the place of the devil must be their future portion. The Lord Jesus, who came to destroy the works of the devil, can alone deliver us from such a state, by grafting in our hearts the love of his name, so that Satan's ways may be hateful to us, and the path of holiness our chief delight.

NOTE.—Gresswell has taken great pains to prove that the nations here mentioned as judged by Christ were the heathen or those without revelation, (see vol. v. part i. p. 571, &c. on the parables,) and Melville has followed the same expositions. In the above exposition "the nations" are supposed to belong to Christendom; and this view I believe to be correct.

CHAP. XXVI. 1—25.

THE LAST PASSOVER—A WOMAN ANOINTS CHRIST'S FEET— JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY HIM.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is *the feast of* the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill *him*. But they said, Not on the feast *day*, lest there be an uproar among the people. Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head as he sat *at meat*. But when his disciples saw *it*, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose *is* this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood *it*, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did *it* for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, *there* shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said *unto them*, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. Now the first *day* of the *feast of* unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a

man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth *his* hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

When Jesus had made an end of all these important discourses, he reminded his disciples that on the approaching passover, within two or three days, he (the Messiah) should be betrayed into the hands of the Jewish rulers, who would deliver him up to the Roman power to be crucified, they having no power within themselves to put any one to death; and accordingly we find a general council of them, consisting of priests, doctors, and elders, with the high priest their president, consulting how they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. The time when this conspiracy was formed, was the time of the passover—a feast instituted in Egypt, to commemorate the destroying Angel's passing over the houses of the Israelites, when he slew the first-born of the Egyptians.* At first the chief priests did not incline to take Jesus at this feast, fearing a tumult and uproar of the people; but Judas presenting them with a fair opportunity, they changed their purpose; and, accordingly, at the feast of the passover, our Saviour suffered, signifying thereby, that he was the true Lamb of God, whom the paschal lamb typified; and a beautiful and most comforting type this is; for as surely as the destroying angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, which were marked with the blood of the Lamb, and did not slay any of their first-born, so surely shall all who are sprinkled with the blood of Christ be accepted in the great day; their transgressions shall be "blotted out as a thick cloud."—"Blessed indeed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

We next read of a certain woman coming to our Saviour as he sat at meat, bringing with her some very costly ointment which she poured over his head, in testimony of her love for him. We find in St. John's Gospel, that Judas† was the first to

* See Exod. xii. † John xii. 4, 5.

murmur at the work of this pious woman—the other disciples seem to have caught his evil feelings for a time. He seemed to regret that there was such a waste made of the ointment. How often does a covetous heart wish to stint the offerings which should be made to the Lord; and how often do worldly persons consider those things as *wasted*, which Christians devote to the service of their Redeemer. They scruple not to spend sums of money and to expend many precious hours, on trifles, while they exclaim against the Christian if he employs what God has lent him in the promotion of the Gospel, or if his time be redeemed from idle conversation, or society, for the purpose of private prayer. "To what purpose," say they, "is this waste?" Happy they who are so far from considering time and talents as wasted upon religion, that the occupations which attend it, are the joy and solace of their hearts. The time of our Lord's death now drew near, and by the grateful act of this woman, his body had, in a manner, been embalmed, for the perfume of the ointment did not leave him, till that body was laid in the tomb.

And now Satan's rage and man's atrocity, had reached their summit, when Judas yielded to the horrid temptation of betraying his Lord and Master. Some may inquire what the particular motive was, that led Judas to commit so base a crime: covetousness was evidently the spring, for we do not find that he had any particular malice against Christ at first; but a base and unworthy spirit of covetousness possessed him to sell his Master; how small a sum tempted the covetous mind of Judas! "thirty pieces of silver," or less than four pounds of our money. This was the price of a slave, or common servant.* Christ "took upon him the form of a servant," so his life was valued at the rate of a servant's life. It may seem a wonder, that the high priests should offer so little for the life of our Saviour, and that Judas should accept so small a sum, seeing that his covetousness was so great, and their rage so dreadful. But the Scripture must be fulfilled, and the prophecy exactly came to pass. "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." † Let none of us be concerned if we should be despised and undervalued for being the disciples of Jesus: we can never meet with so great a reproach—so low an abasement for Christ, as he submitted to for us.

The time of the passover being at hand, Jesus sends two of his disciples to Jerusalem, to prepare for it—accordingly they

* Exod. xxi. 32. † Zech. xi. 12.

enter into the city, and find the master of an house, whose heart Christ had, by divine power, so inclined, that he willingly accommodated them upon this occasion. Christ has such an influence upon, and command over, the spirits of men, that he can incline them to do what service soever he pleases for him. May he now incline our hearts fully to receive this blessed Gospel of peace.

When Christ was at supper with his disciples, he saith to them, "one of you shall betray me." Their sorrow was exceeding great at hearing that their Master should suffer, and that the traitor should be one of themselves. It caused each of them to search himself, and say, "Master, is it I?" Every one who barters religion for the sake of worldly pleasure or prosperity, is a traitor to Christ. Do not look round on others with suspicion, but suspect yourself, and say, "Master, is it I?" Say it too with a determination of removing the traitor-lust, or sin, or propensity, of which conscience accuses you. We ought to be the more earnest in such examination as this, because the doom of those who indulge in opposition to conscience, will be most heavy. What heart can conceive the awful and tremendous import of these words, "It had been good for that man, if he had not been born!"

NOTE v. 23.—τρυβλίον, a dish in which food, particularly of the more liquid kind, is brought to table. The Moors and Arabs, in eating pottage, break their bread or cakes into little bits (ψωμια sops) and dip their hands and their morsels together therein.—*Parkhurst.*

CHAP. XXVI. 26—46.

THE LORD'S SUPPER INSTITUTED—CHRIST'S SORROW IN GETHSEMANE.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all *men* shall be offended because of thee, *yet* will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him,

Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou *wilt*. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

IMMEDIATELY after the celebration of the passover, and while yet sitting at the table, our Lord instituted that Sacrament which was to keep up a continual remembrance of his death, till his coming again. The Lamb slain at the passover, we have already seen, was a type of Christ, but when the person typified did come, the type was no longer of use. The passover, therefore, was now to cease, and as a substitute for it, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was instituted. The Jewish passover was commemorative, and prospective: commemorative—as it recalled to memory the miraculous deliverance of the Jews in Egypt, by the marking of their doors with the blood of a lamb; prospective—as it looked forward to the time when Christ, the Lamb of God, should shed his blood for the safety and deliverance of his people. Of the same nature is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; it reminds Christians that they should look back at what Jesus had done, and look forward to that season with joyful hope, when he shall "appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." * There is something very expressive in the words of the insitution, "Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it—and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." The bread was a fit emblem of Him, who is our life and sustenance. When Jesus blessed it, he set it apart from common uses, and when he brake it, he significantly set forth the bruising of his own body for our sins. He calls the

* Heb. ix. 28.

bread his body, and the wine he calls his blood—because it is usual to call the sign and the thing signified by the same name —"And that rock was Christ." And so "in eating and drinking we *signify* the body and blood which were offered for us—You receive the Sacrament as a similitude—it is the figure of the body and blood of the Lord—You drink the similitude of the precious blood."* To suppose that the bread was changed into real flesh, and the wine into real blood, is to destroy the very nature of a Sacrament—which must have both a sign and a thing signified—whilst it leads to a carnal and not a spiritual Communion. We are indeed taught to pray "that we receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood." In this sense we hold a real presence in the Lord's Supper—but then it is only vouchsafed to faith. All receive the outward emblem, the believer only receives the body and blood of Christ—because he "feeds on him in his heart by faith with thanksgiving." And in this view there can be no doubt, the Lord's Supper is the highest means of grace—the channel of largest blessing to the soul quickened by the Spirit. Are you of the number of Christ's people? If so, you will rejoice at the celebration of that feast. You will go to it as a real means of grace; where you may expect to feed on Christ in your heart by faith, whilst the scene of the Redeemer's last sufferings will be pictured to your mind. The narrative of his agony in the garden will cause you to ask—why must the Son of God have thus suffered? and there is but one true answer—our sins put this bitter cup into his hands, and caused him all this exceeding bitterness of soul.

We should all remember that nothing but the inconceivable pains and sufferings of the Son of God, could have atoned for sin. What a view does this give us of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the unbending justice of God! Sin is made little of by worldly persons; but see here what an evil and bitter thing it is, and how it tried all the patience of the Redeemer, when he was to bear the load of it, and offer himself to the stroke of divine vengeance. What grief and sorrow must have oppressed the Saviour in Gethsemane—when he uttered those mysterious words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." What was it, what could it be, O Saviour, that lay

* Ambrose on the Sacraments, lib. iv. c. 4.

thus heavy upon thy divine soul? Was it the fear of death? Was it the fore-felt pain, shame, and torment of thy ensuing crucifixion? O poor and base thoughts of the narrow hearts of cowardly and impotent mortality! How many thousands of thy blessed martyrs have welcomed no less tortures with smiles and gratulations! Whence had they their strength but from thee? If their weakness were thus undaunted and prevalent, what was thy power? No, no, it was the sad weight of the sin of mankind—it was the heavy burden of the Father's wrath for our sin, that thus pressed thy soul and wrung from thee these bitter expressions.* Our sins were imputed to him that he might suffer what we should have suffered, and feel the whole weight of God's vengeance, in his soul and body.† There is here a force of instruction, equal to the voice of a thousand tongues, to warn us of our danger—of the curse which cleaves to us for sin—and the horrible unknown pains we must endure, if we are not now made partakers of the merits of Christ, and created anew after his image of holiness, by the regenerating Spirit of God. Let us not mistake nor build upon any false foundation. Christ is that *rock*, on which if we build our heavenly house, we shall be safe, but every thing except Christ, is *sand*.

NOTE v. 45.—If instead of reading this verse, "Sleep on now," as in the authorized translation, we read it interrogatively—"Do ye sleep on now?" we seem to have the whole subject before us in the clearest light.

CHAP. XXVI. 47—75.

CHRIST BETRAYED BY JUDAS—CARRIED TO CAIAPHAS AND DENIED BY PETER.

And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out *his* hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a

* Bishop Hall's Contemplations, book iv. con. xxviii. † 2 Cor. v. 21.

thief, with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led *him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, *yet* found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This *follow* said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what *is it which* these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote *him* with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee? Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before *them* all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another *maid* saw him, and said unto them that were there, This *fellow* was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto *him* they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art *one* of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

THESE verses contain a particular account of the manner in which the traitor Judas effected his purpose of delivering up Jesus into the hands of his enemies. Having obtained an armed multitude, he became their guide, for without his assistance, they could not have found Jesus in his retirement. As commander of the party, Judas gave them a sign, or signal, lest another should be seized in mistake: the Jews might have known him, but the Roman soldiers who were employed, needed the signal. "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he, hold him fast." What a dissembling compliment! He comes close to Jesus: surely if ever his hard heart relents, it will be now, when he looks the Saviour in the face; he will either be awed by the majesty, or charmed by the sweetness of his countenance. But he is proof against all compunction; he comes to him, and says, "Hail! master! and kissed him." Was ever heart so possessed

by Satan? Was ever suffering so aggravated as Christ's? The first that appeared among his enemies, was one of those disciples, who, but an hour or two before, sat at the table, and took bread with him! and then were the words of the inspired Psalmist fulfilled—"Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."* Are there none in the present day, who, like Judas, sell the Saviour? Yes, all those who for the sake of wealth, power, or pleasure, renounce Christ, his word, and his people. Such persons virtually sell the Saviour, for those gratifications in which they indulge.

Behold the forbearance of Christ in all his sufferings! He who had all the power of heaven at command—he who could summon the heavenly host, and take signal vengeance of his enemies, is yet patient and submissive. Why was all this? Because "the Scripture must needs be fulfilled," and "thus it became him to fulfil all righteousness." The Prophet Isaiah had said, seven hundred years before, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."† How fully was this accomplished, when, summoned before the bar of the chief priests and elders, he manifested his innocence by perfect silence. They accused him, but when their accusations failed, and were unsupported by proper testimony, they shamelessly hired false witnesses, who, by perjury, might further their base design of murder: still, "Jesus held his peace"—a significant expression to denote his peaceful silence. The question is put to Jesus—"Tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?"—Though silent before, yet when pointedly addressed, he replies, in words, which signify—"I am the Christ, the Son of God;" and when his lips had once broken silence, he proceeds to tell his impious judges, that he should yet change places with them—that they should yet behold Him coming in the clouds of heaven—He, the Judge, and they, culprits at his bar. This solemn address to the chief priest raised his rage to the highest; he said, "he hath spoken blasphemy, what farther need have we of witnesses?" Then did the people, by heaping insults upon him, unconsciously fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting."‡

* Psalm xli. 9. † Isaiah liii. 7. ‡ Isaiah l. 6.

How, it may be asked, did the disciples of Jesus behave on this trying occasion? Where were the fruits of Peter's boasting—"Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee; likewise also said all the disciples?" Alas! what is man when left to himself, and how great is the dread which one sinful worm has of another! "All the disciples forsook him and fled;" and Peter thrice denies, yea, with oaths and cursing too, that he was ever acquainted with Jesus. Peter had before this, "followed afar off." Let Christians dread the first symptoms of a coldness in the service of Christ; it may lead, by gradual steps, to a departure from his authority. This indeed will be a temporary falling away—the Lord will not cast them off now, nor break that covenant which he has made with them for Christ; but he will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes,*—so that by acute and painful trials, shall they be obliged to retrace their steps, till driven again into the narrow path of holy obedience. Let not Peter's shameful fall be an encouragement, on the one hand, for any to indulge in sin, nor on the other, to despair of pardon, if a sudden temptation has led them into sin. It cost Peter many a tear—not to wash out his sin, for a sea of tears could not effect that; but they were tears of self-abhorrence and remorse, at the recollection of such base ingratitude.

CHAP. XXVII. 1—25.

CHRIST DELIVERED TO PONTIUS PILATE—JUDAS HANGETH HIMSELF—PILATE ANXIOUS TO RELEASE JESUS.

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led *him* away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou *to that*. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel

* Psalm lxxxix. 30—33.

did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me. And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. Now at *that* feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? *They* all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it*. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children.

"WHEN the morning was come"—the morning of the gloomiest day for Christ, but the happiest day that ever dawned, for us—the chief priests and elders held another council, and then determined to hand over Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, for the Jews had then no power of capital punishment, as the sceptre had departed from them.

The death of the unhappy Judas is here related; he repented, *i. e.* he saw what a crime he had committed, and was sorry for it, but it was not a repentance towards God, or he would not have hanged himself. A mere sense of sin, without a consequent turning to God, is not repentance, but rather produces that "sorrow of the world" which "worketh death." * He took back the money to the chief priests, as if their taking it off his hands, would have removed his guilt; but they refused it; and mark their answer to his professions of sorrow, "What is that to us? see thou to that." This is all the comfort that the devil and ungodly friends will give, after they have enticed you to sin. Their company may be pleasant, when health permits you to share in their amusements or excesses; but when the hour of sickness comes, or when you are suffering under the goading of

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

an awakened conscience, you will find them miserable comforters.

What sanctified villainy did these chief priests manifest! they would not receive back the money from Judas, as if it were a violation of their conscience to take the price of blood, forgetting that this very money had been paid by themselves, as hire, to the traitor Judas. This truly was "straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel." Further, they thought to atone for their crime, by an act of humanity, for they expended the money which Judas threw before them, in the purchase of a public burying-ground, for strangers. Such a vain idea as this once prevailed in our own country, when persons imagined that by the building of churches, and endowment of monasteries, they might so gain the favour of God, that he would overlook, and pardon their immoralities; but now that the word of God is more widely disseminated, such absurdities are less frequent, and the truth is made more manifest, that nothing can remove sin but the atoning blood of Jesus.

It was no small aggravation of the sin of the Jews, that Pontius Pilate, a heathen magistrate, should have laboured to release Jesus. His wife, too, sent to dissuade him from being a party to his death; and so convinced was Pilate of his innocence, that he endeavoured to show, by the washing of his hands, that he was clear from the guilt of his murder. But this was a vain idea, to protest that he was innocent of his blood, while he did not use his authority to protect him. What men allow and practise, must ever be considered as a voluntary act. The priests and people were so infuriate, that they erred in another point, and thought that they could transfer the guilt from Pilate to themselves; they said, "His blood be on us, and on our children." They made Pilate believe that by their becoming bound to divine justice, they could save him from guilt. But those who are themselves bankrupts, cannot be admitted, as security for others. No man can answer to God for his brother, but he who has no sin of his own to answer for. Blessed be God, we have one who can answer for us—that very Jesus whom we read of; "He did no sin," and by virtue of his atoning sacrifice he can stop the arm of divine justice, uplifted against any of us, and say—"his guilt be upon me," "deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." But what madness must have filled the minds of those who cried out for the blood of Jesus to light in vengeance upon them, and what still greater barbarity, to entail the same misery on their children!

They cursed themselves, and God in heaven ratified it, for, from that time to the present, the Jews have been suffering the signal displeasure of the Almighty, by a succession of such calamities as no other nation ever endured. They are living witnesses of that truth which they wished to disprove, that Jesus is the Son of God. Let those who are in the habit of calling down the curse of God upon themselves, or on others, beware lest their impious prayers be in like manner confirmed, and fall in vengeance upon their own heads.

NOTE on v. 9.—It was not Jeremiah, but Zechariah (chap. xi. 12, 13,) who predicted that Messiah should be sold for the small price of thirty pieces of silver. Why then does St. Matthew attribute it to Jeremiah? The usual reply seems the best,—most likely some ignorant transcriber inserted it in an ancient manuscript, and that before that, it was only, "by the prophet." Beza says that the Syriac paraphrase does not mention the name of any prophet, and that this confirmed him in holding the above conjecture.

CHAP. XXVII. 26—66.

CHRIST IS MOCKED—BEARS HIS OWN CROSS—IS LED TO GOLGOTHA AND CRUCIFIED—HIS BURIAL.

Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *him* to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common-hall, and gathered unto him the whole band *of soldiers*. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place, called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall: and when he had tasted *thereof*, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God: let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also,

which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard *that*, said, This *man* calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled *it* with vinegar, and put *it* on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathæa, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth; And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate. Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make *it* as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

The sentence of death being passed by Pilate, the Roman soldiers proceed to heap indignities upon the suffering Jesus. He whose Palace would soon be the Heavens, is now conveyed "to the common Hall." He whose brow would soon be encircled with the Victor's crown, is now lacerated with a thorny wreath; and Jesus patiently submits, while the soldiers amuse themselves by decking him with the mock insignia of royalty. Who can, without emotion, behold the sad pomp of his bloody execution! He comes forth, bearing that cross which was soon to bear him, and after easing him from this load, which it is probable they found him unable to sustain, they laid it upon Simon a Cyrenian, and thus marched to Golgotha, the place of execution. And here let it be remarked what a number of prophecies were fulfilled on this memorable day; some which had been uttered

seven hundred, others, above one thousand years before. It had been foretold that he should be scourged *—that he should be crucified †—that they should part his garments, and cast lots upon his vesture ‡—that his side should be pierced §—that he should die with malefactors, and have his grave with the rich. ‖ Each prophecy we have just read, was exactly fulfilled, and thus the divine authority of those several books which contain the prophecies, was established, while, at the same time, it was abundantly proved that Jesus was the true Messiah, because all the circumstances of his death accorded with what those prophets had so long before described; and yet so blind were the Jews, that they would not see the fulfilment of prophecy—nay, even the centurion who guarded him, was sooner convinced than they, for the events which accompanied his death were so remarkable, that he exclaimed, "truly this was the Son of God." The frame of nature solemnized the death of its author. Heaven and earth were mourners. The sun was clad in black; and if the inhabitants of the earth were unmoved, the earth itself trembled under the awful load: there were few to pay the Jewish compliment of rending their garments, but the rocks were not so insensible—they rent their bowels: he had not a grave of his own, but other men's graves opened to him. Death and the grave might be proud of such a tenant in their territories; but he came not there as a subject—he came as an invader—a conqueror: it was then the king of terror lost his sting.

Let us now turn aside and see this great sight—the Son of God extended on a Cross. Let our imagination paint the scene—the horror of that darkness—the terror of the earthquake—the gloom of the Saviour's mind, when that expression was extorted from his lips, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Behold the Mediator betwixt God and man—the reconciler of heaven and earth lifted up between earth and heaven that he might bring both into union. Behold the great Captain of our salvation, the conqueror of all the powers of hell, exalted upon this triumphal chariot of the Cross, that he might trample upon death and drag all the infernal principalities manacled after him. Those arms which his enemies meant violently to extend, are stretched forth for the embracing of all mankind, who shall come in for the benefit of his all-sufficient redemption.¶ Behold here, in darkest colours, the awful justice of God,

* Isaiah l. 6. † Psalm xxii. 14, 17. ‡ Psalm xxii. 18.
§ Zech. xii. 10. ‖ Isaiah liii. 9.
¶ Bishop Hall's Contemplation, xxxii. b. iv.

which could be satisfied with no less a sacrifice; behold, in brightest colours, the amazing love of Jesus, who yielded himself up a willing sacrifice for the sins of his people. Let ungodly sinners here learn what weight of vengeance shall fall upon them, if they obtain not an interest in what Jesus has done and suffered; let the redeemed of the Lord here learn lessons of love, gratitude, and hatred of sin; let them weep before the Cross, while they behold mercy's streams, in streams of blood.

Jesus now yields up the ghost: nature sinks, not under the weight of bodily sufferings, for the thieves who were crucified with him were still alive, but under the inexpressible load of mental agony. The veil, or curtain, in the temple which concealed the Holy of Holies from public view, was now miraculously torn from top to bottom, so that the place which the high priest alone might visit, and that but once a year, was now fully exposed, thus to show that the way into the Holiest was open to all believers by the rent veil of his flesh.*

The chapter concludes with an account of our Lord's burial; and here we may ask—what benefit comes to us from his remaining in the grave until the third day. We reply—much every way. It shews us the amazing depth of his humiliation, from what and to what his love brought him—even from the bosom of his Father to the bosom of the grave. It may also comfort us against the fears of death—the grave could not long keep Christ—it shall not always keep us—it was a loathsome prison before, it is a perfumed bed now—he whose head is in heaven, need not fear to put his feet into the grave. Awake and sing, thou that dwellest in the dust, for the enmity of the grave is slain by Christ.†

It would seem, however, as if all the hopes of his followers were buried with him, for "as yet they knew not the Scriptures, that he must rise again from the dead." But though "sorrow may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning." We shall soon hear of his glorious resurrection. If artful priests and valiant soldiers could have confined the Saviour in the tomb, they would have done so; they suspected some attempt to remove him, and every precaution was used to prevent it. They obtained a guard from Pilate, because "the deceiver," as they called Jesus, had said he would rise again. Let us turn this against them, and use it for our own benefit; IF JESUS DID RISE,

* See Heb. ix. 7. and x. 19, 20.

† Burkett's notes on John xix. 42.

THEN WAS HE NOT A DECEIVER. This we shall find abundantly proved in the next chapter.

NOTE on v. 53.—Melancthon supposes that the saints who rose after Christ's resurrection, were Adam, Noah and the most ancient patriarchs. This is mere conjecture. They were witnesses to Christ's resurrection, but with *what* bodies they rose, and *how long* they remained, cannot be found out, and "it is a vain curiosity to labour in a thing not necessary to be known."—See Marlorate in loco.

CHAP. XXVIII.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION—HE APPEARS TO THE WOMEN—IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE.

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men*. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers. Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him *away* while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

VERY early in the morning, on the first day of the week, those women who were last at the Cross, came first to the tomb of the Lord Jesus: and what must have been their surprise to find that the sealed stone, which covered the mouth of the sepulchre, had

been removed! St. Matthew relates how this occurred; "The Angel of the Lord descended, and rolled back the stone;" the guard of Roman soldiers, whose stout hearts would have yielded to no common danger, "did shake, and they became as dead men," while the women were enabled, fearlessly, to converse with the angel, and to receive from his lips the welcome news that Jesus had risen from the dead. They were then employed, as messengers, to proclaim the glad tidings to the apostles, and to state the appointed place where Jesus would meet them. While going on this errand, the Saviour manifested himself to them, so that *their* testimony might be added to the truth of his resurrection.

A few arguments for this important doctrine of our faith, may here, with propriety be stated. It is a fact admitted by all, that the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb; of this there can be no doubt, for the chief priests would not have set a guard of soldiers, to watch an empty sepulchre. It is also an admitted fact, that on the third day, the body was not to be found in the tomb; the question then is—what became of it? The chief priests would tell us that it was stolen; but we have abundant evidence to prove that Jesus rose from the dead. If the body was removed, who stole it? was it the enemies of Christ? no—it was their great object to keep him in the tomb. Was it the disciples? it is probable they would not, and it is next to certain that they could not: frail and timorous as they were—who, when they saw him taken prisoner—fled, and deserted him; is it probable that they would have attempted to overcome a band of Roman soldiers who were armed, and aware of danger? But it is asserted that the soldiers slept on their post, and that the disciples seized this opportunity of conveying the body away. No one could have given evidence on this point, but the soldiers themselves; and we see how ill contrived are the schemes of wicked men, when the chief priests brought forward those soldiers, to prove what happened while they were asleep. These soldiers were either asleep or awake; if they were awake, they never would have suffered a few timorous men to overpower them; if they were asleep, they could know nothing of what happened, so that by their own testimony, the whole was a base fabrication, in order to get over the stubborn fact, that Jesus rose from the dead.

The necessity for the resurrection may next be considered. Had Jesus remained in the grave, all his previous work would have gone for nothing, for we should have no evidence that his

atonement was accepted.* He put himself in his people's place, to answer the demands due to the justice of God, on their account. If any person should offer to discharge the debts of another, and should submit to confinement in his stead, as long as he was actually in jail, there would be no proof that the other man's creditor was satisfied; nay, the circumstance of his being detained, would prove that the amount due, was not paid: but if the creditor himself were to throw open the prison doors, and release the prisoner, his friend for whom he was surety, would have proof beyond doubt, that his creditor was fully satisfied. Thus was it with Jesus, who was his people's substitute: had he remained in the tomb, endless doubt must have existed, as to the validity of his atonement; but since God's own hand removed the stone, and released the prisoner, his people may rejoice in the assurance, that the work which he undertook, has been fully accomplished by him, and accepted by God in their behalf.†

Let it now be remembered, that every one who is a true servant of Christ, experiences, spiritually, in his soul, what Christ literally underwent in his body. Was Christ crucified, dead and buried? The believer has an old, corrupt nature, which is crucified and mortified; so that he becomes "dead unto sin." Was Christ raised from the dead? The believer rises from a death in sin—becomes "alive unto God," and "walks in newness of life."‡ None who are without this death unto sin, and new birth unto righteousness, have any lot or part, in what Jesus has done.

Our Lord's last words to his disciples, previous to his ascension, contain the institution of the sacrament of Baptism, which was to be administered in the name of the divine Trinity; shewing that all Christians are dedicated to God in his covenant character, and that he alone, as Father, Redeemer, and Comforter, can prepare us for his service on earth, and his kingdom in glory. He also gave the apostles a divine commission to preach the Gospel to the nations of the earth, with the gracious assurance that he would be with them to the end of the world; a promise fulfilled to us in the possession of their inspired word, and in the continuance of that apostolic ministry, which derives all its authority from a due succession; first, the apostles,—then the bishops and pastors of the early Church, by whom the ministry has been handed down, to the lawful pastors of the present day. If we value these means, we should endeavour that they be made known to other nations, who are in the same darkness as once enveloped our own land.

* 1 Cor. xv. 14—18. † Rom. iv. 24, 25. ‡ Rom. vi. 5, 6, 11.

THE GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO

St. MARK.

CHAP. I. 1—22.

THE OFFICE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST—JESUS IS BAPTIZED AND TEMPTED—HE CALLETH PETER, ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, *saying*, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts: and the angels ministered unto him. Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets and followed him. And when he had gone a little farther

thence, he saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. And they went into Capernaum: and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the Scribes.

ALREADY have we heard the testimony which one inspired historian has given to the character, the doctrine, and the miracles of the Lord Jesus. The next who succeeds in this important and privileged office is St. Mark, who is believed to have been the same person who was "surnamed Mark," and to whose mother's house St. Peter retired when released by the angel from prison.* It is generally agreed, that this Gospel was written under the immediate inspection of the apostle Peter—a circumstance which makes the humility of that servant of God more conspicuous, since his denial of Christ is given more fully in this part of the Gospel history than in any other. St. Mark's introduction is somewhat singular; for whilst other evangelists style our Saviour, "the Son of Man," he calls him expressly "the Son of God," a glorious title, and well suited to engage the attention of the Romans, for whose use this Gospel is supposed to have been compiled. With the same view, probably, he omits such particulars as might be of more use to his own countrymen than to foreigners: as the genealogy of Christ; the massacre of the children at Bethlehem; the account of Jesus' birth; the sermon on the mount, which exposes the false morality of the Pharisees, to which the Gentiles were strangers; and in general, the quotations of certain prophecies of the Old Testament. On the other hand, he adds some things for the sake of the Gentiles, to enable them to understand the history of Christ. A strong similarity will be found between this Gospel and St. Matthew's, but the coincidence seems to have arisen rather from the circumstance of the two evangelists having written the history of the same grand and highly interesting events, than from any design in the one, of borrowing materials from the other.

St. Mark entitles his history, "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," or, in other words, good news, concerning Jesus Christ. Happy are we if we are prepared by divine grace to welcome the Gospel; and if the assembling of ourselves at family worship, to hear a portion of that Gospel read, be

* See Acts xii. 12.

ranked among our many privileges, instead of being considered a tedious and wearisome task. God's service must be performed, "not by constraint, but willingly." If it be a *forced* work, it proves that our hearts are not in it, and God will accept nothing but what comes from the heart.

The sacred writer proceeds with a brief account of John the Baptist, whose office was to prepare the people for the readier reception of the Messiah. The lowliness of John's character is peculiarly striking. He laboured to lead the people from attaching any importance to himself, and invariably turned their attention to his Divine Master, as the object of their praise;* hereby leaving an example to all ministers of the Gospel, who should overlook their own services, "and preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."

The baptism of our blessed Lord is again related in this Gospel,† as is also the circumstance of God the Father's accompanying voice, bearing testimony to the divine mission of God the Son, and conveying the approval of his work in these words, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." What have we to dread if the Eternal Father has expressed complete satisfaction with what Jesus has done; what can we fear if *we* are accepted in the Beloved? ‡ But let us not mistake the matter, or conceive that the work which Jesus has accomplished will, in the slightest degree, avail us, so long as we keep at a distance from him. Those only who have faith in him as revealed in the word, are received into the family of God. Whilst all who continue in unbelief and carelessness lie under the full weight of their sins, penitent believers can rejoice in the fulness of God's pardoning mercy.

We are informed that John the Baptist was cast into prison: other evangelists state the reason why—because of his fidelity in executing the ministerial office, and reproving Herod for his sin.§ From this prison he never came forth alive, for there he was beheaded. But no sooner did our Lord hear of his imprisonment, than he went into Galilee, where John himself had been preaching, and bore testimony to the very truths which John himself had maintained. The scope of John's ministry had been, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and the instant that this holy man was precluded from any further discharge of

* See John iii. 27—31.

† Christ was baptized, not that he might be cleansed by the water, but that he might sanctify the water to the mystical washing away of sin.—*Ambrose.*

‡ Eph. i. 6. § Matt. xiv. 3, 4.

his ministry, our blessed Lord insisted on the same awakening topic, saying, "the time *is* fulfilled, and the kingdom of God *is* at hand: repent ye and believe the Gospel." As John's ministry was preparatory to that of the Son of God, so was Christ's preaching preparatory to the ministration of the Spirit. When the Comforter was fully given at Pentecost, the Gospel-kingdom was established, and the former dispensation set aside. How great is our privilege in living under the brightest dispensation that can be expected until the appearing and glorious kingdom of the Son of Man!

The calling of four of the apostles is next mentioned by St. Mark. The instruments which Christ chose to employ in setting up his kingdom, were the weak and foolish things of the world, men, not called from the schools of the philosophers, but from the fishing-boats of Galilee. The design of which was to prove that the success of the Gospel could only be attributed to the power of God—who in this and other ways, bore witness to the divine origin of the Christian religion.* These men were actively employed at their trade, when Jesus commanded their attendance. Christ puts honour upon those who, though mean in the world, are diligent in their business. The great work of ministers is to fish for souls, and win them to Christ. Mankind, in their natural condition, are lost: they wander endlessly in the great ocean of this world, and are carried down the stream of its course and ways. Ministers, in their preaching, cast the net into the waters. A vast multitude are inclosed and brought into the pale of the outward church. So far it is well; but there is a time coming, when the bad fish shall be divided from the good,†—wicked professors of the faith from the godly. How terrible that separation—and how awful will our condition be in that day, "if we neglect so great salvation!"

CHAP. I. 23—45.

AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT CAST OUT—PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW AND OTHERS HEALED —THE CLEANSING OF A LEPER.

And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let *us* alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the

* 1 Cor. i. 27—29. † See Matt. xiii. 48.

Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine *is* this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All *men* seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils. And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth *his* hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish *it* much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

SEVERAL miracles are recorded in this portion of Scripture to have been wrought by our blessed Lord, in confirmation of his being the true Messiah. First he cast the devil out of a man that was possessed, in the synagogue of Capernaum. The unclean spirit, conscious of Christ's superior power, would have made terms of peace if he could, and was obliged to bear testimony to him who "came to destroy the works of the devil."—"I know thee who thou art, the Holy one of God." This is the misery of those wretched spirits, that they persist in their rebellion, and yet know it will end in their destruction. They desire to have nothing to do with Jesus Christ; for they despair of being saved by him, and dread being destroyed by him—"What have we to do with thee?" See whose language they speak, who say to the Almighty, depart from us, we desire not the "knowledge of thy ways." But as Jesus taught, so he

healed with authority. It is vain for Satan to beg and pray, saying, "let us alone;" his power must be broken, and the poor man must be relieved: Jesus rebuked him by the power of his word, he commanded him to come out, and he could not but obey.

Our Lord's next miracle was performed on the mother of Peter's wife. Peter and other of the apostles were married men —nothing was then known of the forced celibacy of ministers of religion.* This woman lay sick of a fever; a case just suited to display the power and love of Jesus. "He took her by the hand, and immediately the fever left her." Observe, how complete the cure was: the fever left her at once, but it did not, as usually, leave her weak, for the same hand that healed, also strengthened her. Whatever Jesus undertakes, he executes completely. After this, crowds of patients flocked around him, and all were attended to. No number could exhaust his patience—no malady could baffle his skill. But we see little of the real worth and importance of these miracles, if we look no further than the mere historic facts. These indeed speak aloud the glory of Jesus, and are calculated to convince the judgment that he was the Son of God; but the grandeur of these works consisted in this,—that they were outward testimonies of the far more noble operations of that grace upon the heart, which we individually need. Let each of us then apply what we read to our own case. Those who came to our Saviour were afflicted with bodily diseases; our malady is of a far worse kind—deadly to the soul—the disease of sin; but Jesus is mighty to save; every miracle he performed is a pledge and assurance of our recovery, if we do but go to him with the same sense of distress, and desire for a cure, as these persons had, of whom we have just read. Were we more in earnest about our souls, our prayers would be more frequent, as well as more solemn; our cry for spiritual health would be more loud; and feeling that unless our hearts were cleansed by this infallible Physician, and our evil habits overcome, we never could be finally saved, we should apply to him without delay, and never cease to ask till the desire of our hearts was obtained.

Our Lord has on many occasions pointed out by his example, the duty of private prayer. Here in particular we are told, that "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out into a solitary place, and there prayed." † We may

* 1 Tim. iii. 2, 4.

† The Greek of this verse, (35,) is very expressive, "And rising up" πρωὶ "early," very early ἔννυχον λίαν—yet "in the night"—i. e. before sun-rise.

learn three things from hence. First the duty of prayer: it is indeed an unspeakable privilege to be allowed to draw near to God, yea, it is the *command* of God that we should pray, and the neglect of prayer is both a breach of the law of God, and a relinquishing of our greatest privilege. Secondly, we learn the best time for prayer,—"early in the morning," when our minds and bodies are fresh for the service, and before the world has got into our hearts; there are many who love prayer so much, and consider this time so valuable for it, that they copy our Lord's example, and give the early morning to this blessed enjoyment; but a far greater number value it so little, that they would not deny themselves a few moments' sleep to procure a time for prayer: they make prayer a task, and not a privilege. Thirdly, we learn that no social prayer should prevent, or take the place of private devotion. Our Lord doubtless often prayed with his disciples, yet did he seek occasions for solitary prayer besides. Our joining in family prayer should never be considered as a substitute for secret prayer. They are distinct kinds of worship; each will prepare for the other, but neither should be omitted.

The last miracle of our Saviour recorded in this chapter is the healing of a leper, that is, a person afflicted with the loathsome disease of leprosy. He came to Jesus, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He knew that he had *power* to remove even the leprosy, which earthly physicians have not. He was not so sure of Christ's *willingness* to heal; but why should we doubt his love more than his power? He has proved both by the blood of the cross; let us apply to him, in faith, without delay. Persons afflicted with sickness are generally anxious to try the skill of the physician who has been of most use to their neighbour: they say, he has cured *him*, perhaps he can cure *me*. Oh, that you would thus think of Jesus! He has cured thousands of their sin, and he can cure you too; yea, he will do so if you ask him earnestly.

Our Lord wishing to avoid every thing that looked like ostentation, or that might excite a tumult, forbade the leper's declaring what had been done, but directed that he should follow the instruction of the ceremonial law, and present himself to the priest, and upon his acknowledging him to be clean, should offer the sacrifice which the law commanded.* The object of this was to afford an evidence to the Jews of the reality of the miracle—of his wish to observe the law of Moses, and as a testimony

* See Lev. xiv. 10—14.

against those who should afterwards accuse him. In this way he also proved his superiority to the Levitical priests, who could only *declare* the man clean or unclean; whereas, Jesus could *touch* the leper without contamination, and remove this terrible disease by his word. The man was so overjoyed at his recovery, that he published the matter everywhere. In this he was wrong, for the Saviour had enjoined silence on him. But we are under no such distressing obligation. If we have derived spiritual aid from Jesus, his command is, that we should go home and tell our friends and neighbours what "great things the Lord hath done for us."

CHAP. II.

CHRIST HEALETH ONE SICK OF THE PALSY—CALLETH MATTHEW—WHAT WORKS MAY BE DONE ON THE SABBATH.

And again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days: and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken *it* up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this *man* thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. And he went forth again by the sea-side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the *son* of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the Scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard *it*, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say

unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles. And it came to pass, that he went through the corn-fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath-day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God, in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shew-bread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

In this chapter we hear of our Saviour miraculously healing a man sick of the palsy. This person was so great a cripple that he could not walk, but was carried by four persons on a bed or couch. We find their faith was great. This poor man and his friends had a firm persuasion that Christ was invested with a divine power, and was able to help him; accordingly they combated all difficulties, and, as no easier way of approach to Jesus offered, they uncovered the roof of the house, and let the bed down, with the sick man on it, into the room where Christ was, which was an easier matter to effect in their houses than in ours.* Just so it is, and will ever be, with those who feel their need of a Saviour; nothing can prevent their coming, when once they are awakened to see their undone and helpless state; they will not mind becoming singular, or using any means, however uncommon, so that they may behold that blessed Saviour who can alone heal and strengthen them.

We find that this man's cure was immediate; for when Jesus saw their faith, by the uncommon means they took to bring the sick man into his presence, he said to him, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." The Scribes protested against this expression, and accused our Lord of blasphemy, urging, that it was God's pecu-

* Perhaps rather into the court where Jesus was, the eastern houses being only one story, built round a paved court, hence απεστέγασαν (uncovered) may mean, to remove the veil which was thrown over the court from one parapet to another.—See Shaw's travels, cited by Horne. Introduction, vol. iii. p. 336.

liar prerogative to forgive sin. Their doctrine was true, but their application of it was false; our Saviour, therefore, gave these scribes a twofold demonstration of his Godhead; first, by letting them understand that he knew their thoughts,—"Jesus perceived in his spirit that they reasoned within themselves;" and secondly, by giving them an evident proof that he had absolute power and authority to remove the disease which was the effect of sin; and this he did in such a sovereign manner as was peculiar to God; when, turning to the sick man, he spake with all the majesty and power of a divine person, "I say unto thee arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." The man immediately arose in full strength, took up his bed, and carried it away, passing through the crowd, and carrying with him the proof that Jesus was God. Let us learn from this narrative, that pardon and spiritual health are to be found in Christ alone: divine justice forbids pardon without a full atonement, and none could offer a suitable atonement but Jesus. How happy then should we consider it, that salvation is in the hands of so compassionate a Saviour as Jesus. He rejected none who came to him on earth—he will reject none who go to him in prayer, now that he is in heaven, and all who are thus freed from the guilt of sin, are enabled to walk with God in spiritual health and vigour.

The calling of Levi, or Matthew, to be one of our Lord's disciples, has already been fully noticed.* He left his base, though profitable trade, the moment our Lord demanded his attendance. Alas! how many hear the Saviour's call conveyed in this Gospel, day after day, and yet never move a step to follow him. They are "like the deaf adder that stopped her ears, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely." It was on the occasion of Matthew's inviting his former associates to his house, for their benefit, that the Scribes and Pharisees found fault with Jesus for joining their company. Their conduct displayed the pride of their hearts. They considered *themselves* too good to join such company; but instead of blaming our Lord for going, they should have rejoiced that these publicans and sinners were in the way of being improved by his company. The answer which our Lord gave, at once reproved them, and excused himself—"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Had men been righteous, Christ had never come to suffer in our

* See Matt. ix. 9.

place. His business lay with sinners, therefore he was justified in going to eat with those who were ready to confess themselves guilty; whereas he had no business with the Pharisees, because they felt not that they were sinners. May we never be deprived of the Saviour's help, by the want of a knowledge of our need of him.

After answering some questions which were proposed to our Lord on the subject of fasting, and which have already been explained, he justifies the conduct of his disciples in plucking some ears of corn on the Sabbath-day, to which the Pharisees had objected. He reminds them of David, who, in a case of necessity, had eaten the shew-bread, which the Jewish priests and their families alone were allowed to taste; * and again, he quotes the example of the priests themselves, who performed laborious work on the Sabbath, by killing, slaying and consuming the sacrifices, and yet incurred no guilt thereby, because they were serving God. So, he argued, that the disciples were blameless, because their necessity arose out of their attendance on him at the synagogue. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The appointment of the Sabbath did not take place till the whole work of creation was complete; therefore man, who was created on the sixth day, could not have been made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath must have been made for him. It was made for his spiritual improvement, and not for his hurt or destruction, much less for profanation. If God has instituted Sabbaths for our good, they are a talent of which we must give an account to him; and think what an awful responsibility we incur by means of them! A person that is seventy years of age, has had no less than ten years of entire Sabbaths! what might not have been done in that time, if they had been properly improved? When therefore the Sabbath arrives, though we should welcome it as a blessing, we should also welcome it with fear and trembling; lest that which is designed for our good, should only aggravate our final condemnation.

* Abiathar is here mentioned, instead of Abimelech, as in 1 Sam. xxi. 2, 6, probably because he brought the ephod to David, and was a long time High Priest in David's reign, having first acted as deputy to his Father, when he gave the shew-bread to David.

CHAP. III. 1—12.

WORKS OF MERCY SUITED TO THE SABBATH—JESUS REFUSES THE TESTIMONY OF THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS.

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath-day: that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath-days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him. But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judea, And from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and *from* beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.

THE holy mind of Jesus was continually wounded by the stubborn opposition of the Jewish rulers. It was not sufficient that he had vindicated the character of his disciples from the charge of Sabbath breaking, but he himself is exposed to a similar imputation on the very next Sabbath, because he healed a man with a withered hand, who attended the synagogue service. "They watched him," hoping to entrap him, but their utmost malice was vain, for they failed to establish a single point against him. It is true that he did cure a poor sufferer on the Sabbath day: but was it not a work of love and mercy, and therefore suited to the day? "He looked round with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts." If sinners knew what the *anger* of God is, it would serve to deter them from many a crime; and if the Lord's people would keep in mind how their sins *grieve* the Holy Spirit of God, it would act as a motive to excite their watchfulness. We should not forget our Lord's question to the cavilling pharisees;—"Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil?" We must be occupied in some way, and if we are not doing good, we shall be

doing evil. Some people think that it is lawful to pass the Sabbath in harmless idleness, neither in worldly labour nor in communion with God; but Christ's question proves them mistaken, —if they are not doing good, by going to the house of prayer, meditating on the word of God, or relieving the wants of their fellow-creatures, the Lord will regard their lazy ease as a profanation of his Sabbath.

While the rich and the idle despised Jesus, the poor crowded to hear him; multitudes from all parts of the country thronged about him. Some in the present day seem to think that the poor and laborious are not required to read the word of God, as if the Scriptures were only intended for ministers or for well-educated persons. This is a sad mistake—all classes are bound to make the Bible their daily companion, either by reading or hearing it read. Rich and poor have all the plague of sin, and must all come to the Saviour in the same way, or they shall never be healed. Here is no distinction of rank; the same disease pervades all—the same remedy must be applied to all. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from *all* sin."

It appears that the unclean spirits who possessed the bodies of men in our Lord's day, had a better knowledge of him than many for whom he lived and died. They here exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God," conscious that he was the Son of the eternal Father, and now also "the seed of the woman." It is true that the Devils only believed in his *existence* and trembled,* but they did not *trust* in him, because he came not to save them, but to cast them out, and finally to destroy the works of the Devil. Neither would Christ allow them to proclaim his name to men, because they were unfit witnesses to the truth of God. It was meet to shew that there was no fellowship between Christ and Belial, and therefore our Lord charged them that they should not make him known. Let us improve these things to our own warning. How great must our sin be, if we remain at a distance from Christ, perhaps, more ignorant of him than these satanic beings. For *them* he came not with salvation, but destruction; for us he was the incarnate, suffering Saviour, occupied day and night in accomplishing the great work of our redemption. Oh! what love was this, what rich and sovereign mercy to guilty man! Shall we not trust in him who has given the best and clearest proofs of his love to us? Trusting in him, we shall love him, and thus shall we be qualified to be his wit-

* James ii. 19.

nesses in a thoughtless world, not only with our lips, but by the solid fruits of a holy and devoted life.

NOTE v. 6.—The Herodians were most likely Sadducees in doctrine, but politically great supporters of Herod, and in favour of paying the tribute to Cæsar.—See Elsley's Annotations, vol. i. p. 343.

CHAP. III. 13—35.

JESUS CALLS THE REST OF HIS APOSTLES—HIS GREAT ZEAL MISTAKEN—WHO ARE HIS TRUE RELATIONS.

And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth *unto him* whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon he surnamed Peter; And James the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder; And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the *son* of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite, And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house. And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard *of it*, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself. And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them *unto him*, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit. There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him; and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

OUR blessed Lord had already called four of his disciples, as we read in the first chapter. Here we find that he added eight more to their number, making twelve in all, perhaps with reference to the twelve Jewish tribes. Two of these, James and his brother, John, he surnamed Boanerges, the sons of thunder,

either because they were more vehement in preaching the word, than the rest, or because they accompanied Christ to the mount, where they heard the voice of God like thunder, of which they afterwards bare witness in their preaching. After this the multitude of his followers increased so much, that they had no room in the house to eat their meals; and it was on this occasion that his friends or relations interfered to check what they conceived was his mistaken zeal. They concluded that he was "beside himself," and that he exceeded all bounds of moderation and prudence.* They therefore sought to lay hold on him, and either by importunity or compulsion, to prevail with him to desist from his excessive labours. The disciple of Jesus suffers often in the same way now, from the painful interference of friends and relatives. Some, no doubt, are urged by mistaken kindness—they excuse their conduct by an anxiety for his health, judging that his labours are indiscreet—that he must spare himself. But though proper caution is to be observed, far more err on the side of too much sparing of themselves, than of too little. The Christian, however, suffers also like his master, from those who are decidedly opposed to his principles and practice. They who have no zeal for the service of God themselves, consider that every thing like zeal in others, is unmeaning, because it is, in fact, a condemnation of their deadness to God, and therefore they brand it with the name of enthusiasm. How often do we hear it said, "such a person is decidedly deranged—his brain has been turned by new fancies about religion—he takes the matter too warmly." But who are the persons that speak thus?—they who are uninfluenced by religion, and are living after the ways of the world. And of whom is this said? of those who show that their religion is influential, by a life of holiness and usefulness. "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." † Is not religion a good thing? if so, we ought to be zealously affected in that cause. If any of us are suffering for our zeal in the service of Jesus, let us commit the keeping of our souls to him in earnest prayer, while, at the same time, by well doing, we may put to silence the ignorance of those who oppose us.‡

Having noticed, at large, our Lord's observations on the

* Many would render, εξέστι, "to be astonished," not wishing to attribute such evil surmises to our Lord's relations, but this seems to give no point to the verse (21); "to be beside oneself" is an usual metaphorical meaning given to this word in classical writers, (see Liddell and Scott,) and in 2 Cor. v. 13, it is opposed to σωφρονειν, to be wise.

† Gal. iv. 18. ‡ 1 Peter iv. 16, 19.

blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, where they occurred in the 12th chap. of St. Matthew, let us now rather consider the expressions of his love towards his people, contained in the last verses of this chapter.—"There came then his brethren and his mother, and standing without, sent unto him, calling him." It would seem as if they came for the same purpose that his kinsmen did before—to make him spare himself; but when told that they were in waiting, he took occasion to declare, that the spiritual relationship which existed between him and his people, was stronger than any bonds of mere natural affection. He describes his people as *those who do his will;* what this will is, may be answered by two quotations from Scripture. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear him," and, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."* Till persons hear, and believe in Jesus, and show the fruits of holiness, they remain, and ever must remain, objects of his wrath. Let us suppose Jesus in the day of his coming, surrounded by the assembled universe, and many who were once related to him in the flesh, calling upon him like his brethren here, and saying—"We have eaten and drunk in thy presence—we are your brethren, your sisters, your nearest relatives,"—we may then imagine him using the same gracious declarations that we have just read "Who is my mother or my brethren?" and stretching out his hands towards his redeemed and obedient followers,—"Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever doth the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." Vain is our hope of being *then* acknowledged by Jesus, if we are not *now* doing his will.

CHAP. IV. 1—20.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER—THE EXPLANATION OF IT.

And he began again to teach by the sea-side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way-side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the

* 1 Thess. iv. 3.

sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them. And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way-side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

The preceding chapter commenced with an account of Christ's teaching in the synagogue, this chapter begins with his "teaching again by the sea-side." Thus he changed his place and method, that if possible all might be instructed. To honour the house of God and to meet those who had seats in the synagogue, he resorted thither, to teach them the way of life; whilst to meet the wants of the poor, he preached where they could come within hearing, by the sea-side, or the road-side. Ministers should consider themselves "debtors both to the wise and to the unwise.'

Our Lord addressed the multitude that followed him, in his usual style of parable: for poor people, such as he then addressed, love to be spoken to in their own language, and will attend to a plain comparison, borrowed from common things, when a dry statement of truth would be carelessly heard, and soon forgotten. The parable was intended to show the different reception which the preaching of the Gospel meets with from different persons. For this purpose our Lord represented the case of a husbandman sowing his seed. Some of the grains which he scattered, fell on the way-side—either upon the public road, or on the path-way, which often led through the corn fields, and on one of which our Lord walked with his disciples,

when they plucked the ears of corn.* The ground on which it fell was hard, unploughed, and uncultivated, and consequently the seed lay exposed, and was immediately devoured by the birds. Some grains fell on stony ground, either where the stones lay unremoved, or where a thin surface of soil covered a deep-seated rock: these sprang up quickly: but as soon withered away, when the sun from above scorched them, and the rock beneath stopped the progress of the tender root. Others again fell upon ground over-run with thorns and noxious weeds, and these were naturally lost, their growth being hindered by their unprofitable neighbours—the weeds. Other seeds, however, met with a better soil, and fell upon ground which had been previously prepared, where the plough had entered, and from which the stones and brambles had been carefully removed. These, as might be expected, grew: there appeared, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

This parable cannot be mistaken,—for our Lord graciously condescended to explain each part; all may now perceive that in it is contained a picture of spiritual things; and that as the seed spoken of, withered or grew, in proportion as the ground was prepared to receive it, so does the word of God, read from the Bible, or spoken by his ministers, decay or prosper, according as the hearts of the hearers have been softened by the Holy Spirit, and cleansed from all those natural impediments which render the word unfruitful. Our object then need not be so much to explain this parable, as to apply it. Each of us belongs to one or other of these four classes of hearers, and let us carefully observe that whatever distinction may exist between the various kinds of unfruitful ground, the issue is the same. The man who chokes the seed of divine truth by an *undue* attention to lawful things, is as much excluded from the benefits of the Gospel, as he, whose flinty heart at once resists the tender impression. There may be distinctions among ourselves, and there will be degrees of punishment hereafter, but let the cause of our rejecting the Gospel be ever so trifling, we shall finally lose all its precious blessings, if we do not belong to those who receive the truth of God in faith and love. "He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all," † and he that resists the Gospel for the sake of one sin, loses all. Let us then beware of *thorns*, as well as of the *rock:* many a man has "a name to live," whom God sees to be dead in sin. It matters

* See Matt. xii. 1. † James ii. 10.

not what we call ourselves, or what we profess; If we bear not the fruits of righteousness, we are not Christians. May that God who knows our hearts, so teach us to know ourselves, that we may not die in false security, or close our eyes in hope of glory, and yet wake in endless misery! What we all want is "a new heart"—prepared, renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God;—we want "the heart of stone" to be taken away, and a tender one to replace it. Till we receive this "new heart," nothing that we hear or read can turn to any account,—it will either be snatched away by Satan,—scorched by trials and persecution, or choked by the pleasures and cares of this vain, delusive world. None of us can change these hearts by our own power. The ungodly will not be condemned because they did not effect this change themselves, but because they did not cry earnestly and sincerely to God, through Christ, to change them by the power of his Spirit. Let us now resolve on earnest prayer to the heavenly husbandman, that he would send the gracious dew of the Spirit from above, and drive the plough of the law over our otherwise hard hearts, so shall we bring forth the fruits of true religion; yea and find that the seed of divine truth is a *growing* principle, for it not only fell on the good ground, but sprang up and *increased*, by a sure and steady growth. May God grant us this blessing, for his own name's sake. Amen.

CHAP. IV. 21—41.

THE CANDLE NOT TO BE PUT UNDER A BUSHEL—THE PARABLE OF THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY—AND OF THE MUSTARD.

And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he saith unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath. And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? *It is* like a grain of mustard-seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and be-

cometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it. And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear *it*. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

It is useful to observe how the different parts of our Lord's discourses are connected with each other. He had just before stated, that good ground would produce good fruit, or in other words, that a truly Christian person would adorn the Gospel by a life of holiness; and then immediately asks the question, "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick?" thereby meaning to imply, that when he has enlightened the heart of any person by a saving knowledge of the truth, that person is not to shine for himself alone—to do his works in secret, but is to consider himself as taught for the good of others, and is to stand forth to enlighten those around him by his life and conversation. In this sense ministers especially are to give light; but each private Christian has a certain sphere, within which his light should shine, that others, seeing the holiness of his life, may desire to be made partakers of the same faith which produces such fruits in him. To encourage the Christian in this line of public usefulness, a promise is given, that as he improves the talents entrusted to him, more grace shall be imparted to him. The comfort and utility of religion increase like a merchant's stock in trade, by constant use, never being allowed to lie idle on his hands: thus the Christian gains much by faithfulness and activity; he has greater joy and comfort in his own soul: his spirituality increases, and the work of God advances within him.

The growth of religion within the heart of a believer is beautifully illustrated by two parables—one the growth of corn, the other, that of the mustard-seed. Just as the husbandman sows his seed, and then quietly goes to rest, and patiently waits for the time of harvest, so the ministers of God must sow in faith,

by dispensing the doctrines of the gospel, neither being over anxious nor yet negligent, if the fruit of their labour doth not immediately appear.* As in the one case the seed takes root in that ground which was previously tilled, so in the other does the word of instruction sink into that heart which is previously prepared by the Holy Spirit; and as the seed which takes root, grows and passes through the various stages of vegetation; "first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear," so religion, once rooted, flourishes, and leads the Christian from one stage of spiritual attainment to another. The tender blade of corn, when it rears its head above the earth, is a lively image of the new-born Christian; he shoots upwards, aspiring towards heaven; his growth is *from* the earth. But many fears are entertained for his safety. The minister through whom he has received the truth, watches as anxiously over him as the husbandman does over the tender corn. He knows his weakness, and the difficulties which he has to encounter. He knows that the chilling blast of persecution may light upon him before he has acquired strength to withstand its influence; or that the too powerful sunshine of prosperity may cause it to decay, while neither rain nor dew descends to moisten it, and so his hopes may be blasted. But what is his joy if he sees the tender object of his care outlive these dangers! If the root be truly struck, he shall outlive them, because it will then be the work of God, and he is pledged to take care of those in whose hearts he has commenced the work of grace. His promise is, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day?" † and again, "the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not." ‡

Thus the believer springs up under the influence of the Holy Spirit; from conviction of sin, and inquiries after salvation, he grows up into a more solid judgment, deeper experience, and humility, and greater simplicity; and so proceeds to increasing fruitfulness in good works. Thus he is prepared for heaven, and when his measure of services and trials is completed, and he is made ready for the glory and felicity intended for him, the stroke of death shall sever him from all earthly connections, he shall be "bound in the bundle of life" with God's people, and laid up, as the wheat of the harvest, in the heavenly granary.

* See Calvin's Comments on this Parable.

† Isaiah xxvii. 3. ‡ Isaiah lviii. 11.

Happy, happy Christian! whose Saviour is the Lord Jesus—whose reconciled Father is the omnipotent Jehovah—whose home is the glorious kingdom—to whom life is pleasant, as affording an opportunity of living to the glory of his Redeemer—to whom death is unspeakable gain, as it unites him to the object of his love. Oh! if such only are Christians, as are here described, how will it be with the world? how will it be with *us?* Surely if the word of God be true, none shall see the kingdom of glory, but such as have the kingdom of grace thus planted within them. Religion must be *all*, or it is nothing.

The parable of the grain of mustard-seed illustrates the same view of the progress which the true Christian makes in vital godliness, until he is matured for a better soil and climate; but it may also refer to the final victory of Christ's kingdom in the world. Small at first, like the tender plant in the Lord's appointed time, it shall fill the earth with fruit. All the noxious plants and fruitless trees of the world shall be cut down by the axe of the great husbandman, when he comes in his glory; and shall give place to the tree of life, whose "leaves are for the healing of the nations." *

All the parables contained in this chapter, seem to have been spoken during the remainder of that day on which the friends of Jesus were dissatisfied with his unwearied labours; yet having persisted in them till the evening, he put to sea, "even as he was," in the ship from which he had preached, and without any peculiar attention to his ease or indulgence after so great fatigues. On this occasion he quelled the violence of the storm which had terrified the disciples;† so far he yielded to their fears, but at the same time reproved their want of faith. If Christ be our's, nothing can harm us—if he be not our's, nothing can save us.

NOTE.—Clement in his first epistle to the Corinthians, has a very beautiful passage on the progress in grace, where he uses the same illustration as in v. 28. See that epistle, sect. xxiii. ω ανοητοι, &c.

* Rev. xxii. 2.

† πεφίμωσο—"be thou *bridled*," is more emphatic than our version "be still." Why should the disciples doubt his power who could thus bridle the sea by a word!

CHAP. V. 1—20.

CHRIST CASTS OUT THE LEGION OF DEVILS—HE LEAVES THE GADARENES.

And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any *man* tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, *thou* unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name *is* Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and told *it* in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw *it* told them how it befel to him that was possessed with the devil, and *also* concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all *men* did marvel.

THIS chapter calls us to contemplate the varied glories of our Redeemer's power and love, and each of the instances here set before us may be considered not only as a miracle, but also as an emblem of his gracious operation on the hearts of men. We may form a faint idea of his love and pity, from the circumstance first presented to us; it appears that his passage across the lake was undertaken for no other purpose than to relieve one poor sufferer from Satan's dominion, for as soon as this was done he returned. We need not therefore fear being overlooked by him; *one* soul is precious in his sight.

On reaching the opposite shore, there met him a man possessed with a devil. He dwelt in no house, nor did he wear any clothes, but wandered about naked, in solitary places among the tombs—the dread and terror of all that passed by. His supernatural strength was so great, that neither power nor art could tame or bind him. In this forlorn manner he continued, wounding and cutting himself with stones. But as soon as this fierce and ungovernable creature saw Jesus, the devil which possessed him was so overawed, that he ran and paid him solemn homage, and knowing that the power of God was stronger than his, he besought him that, after leaving the man, he might be allowed to take possession of a herd of swine, which was feeding near at hand. Jesus permitted it to be as he requested, and the consequence was, that the whole herd perished in the lake. These swine were the property of Jews, who kept them in express violation of the Jewish law; their destruction therefore was no more than the just punishment of their disobedience and avarice.

The effect which this miracle produced upon the neighbourhood, gave a lamentable proof of their abandoned state. Instead of prostrating themselves before Jesus, and returning thanks that their swine only perished, while they were allowed to escape; and then imploring the Saviour to remain and instruct them; they overlooked his forbearance, and desired him to depart from their coasts. Wretched people! their day of grace arrived, and they abused it. The Saviour visited them and healed the demoniac, the terror of their neighbourhood, and thereby prevented Satan from usurping power over them, and yet to that Saviour they say, "depart out of our coasts;" and why? because they cared more for their ungodly traffic, than they did for their souls. Would to God that this indifference were confined to the coast of Gadara; but unconverted man is the same everywhere; our own towns and villages, yea, our own families will furnish many, who, though not *in words*, yet *in fact* speak the same language. They are worldly-minded and engrossed in this world's pursuits; perhaps they acknowledge it, but still they will not part with their sins. At length the Lord visits them—he speaks in the person of his minister, or by the forcible message of a serious disappointment, trial or affliction: yet still they are hardened; they overlook the favour—disregard the minister—or mourn over the trial, without thinking that it came, charged with an awakening message from the Lord; or, if in the hour of affliction, a serious thought does cross their minds, the next gleam of worldly sunshine dries their tears, and they say to Christ and religion,

"depart from us." Jesus did as the Gadarenes requested—he departed; and never do we hear that they were favoured with another visit from him. Let those who have slighted the favours and warnings of the Lord, take a lesson from this. His long-suffering is great, but it has an end; and he will act in conformity with strict justice, when he withdraws the means of grace from those who abuse them.*

What a view of Satanic opposition to Christ does this passage give us! When this demoniac first saw Christ, he exclaimed, "What have I to do with thee! Jesus, thou Son of the most High God?" as if abjuring the least connection with the blessed God. This is a true picture of Satan. He then requested Christ's permission to enter into the swine, that he might cause their destruction, and so excite the people's hatred against Christ. The Lord, by casting him out of this possessed sufferer, shewed his power over the evil one; but his permission to stir up the Gadarenes against Christ, proves that hearts willing to act under the tempter's power, are often left to such a master. Oh! may we take warning, and submit ourselves to Christ's easy yoke, so shall we be able to resist all the wiles of our spiritual enemies.

CHAP. V. 21—43.

THE WOMAN WITH THE BLOODY ISSUE HEALED—THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS RAISED.

And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: *I pray thee*, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And *Jesus* went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse; When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her

* The altered character of the demoniac is noticed in the remarks on the commencement of the viiith chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.

that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague. While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's *house certain* which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was *of the age* of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straightly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

JESUS having now reached the other side, where much people were gathered together, a certain ruler of the synagogue, being in deep distress at the illness of his daughter, came and implored our Lord's assistance, and while on the way to his house the people thronged him. In the middle of this crowd was one poor woman, who had been afflicted for twelve years with a disorder, which exceedingly weakened her frame, and rendered her ceremonially unclean. Already had she tried various methods of recovery, and had impoverished herself in procuring the aid of physicians, but all in vain; nay, her malady grew worse. However, she thought within herself, that this compassionate Saviour, who was going to heal the rich man's daughter, might, perhaps, take pity on her, poor though she was. She therefore formed the scheme of stealing a cure; for the nature of her disorder made her reluctant to mention it; here was an error; she certainly had high thoughts of Christ's power, but it was vain to imagine that the mere touch of his clothes, could, by any natural efficacy, cure her, without his being conscious of it! In pursuance of her design, she seized the opportunity, when Jesus was surrounded by the multitude, and coming behind him, touched his garment; nor was she disappointed in her expectations; for, notwithstanding her erroneous views, and the infirmity which was mixed with her faith, the disorder was instantaneously removed, and her impaired vigour completely restored. Had the matter ended here, the woman would have gone away with the foolish impression that the healing virtue was in the Saviour's

garment, rather than in himself—she would also have come short of the instruction which she afterwards received—Christ would have been deprived of the honour of the miracle—and we should have been left without the valuable instruction to be deduced from the narrative. Our Lord therefore being conscious that "virtue," or divine energy, had gone forth from him to effect this cure, demanded who had touched his clothes. When all denied, and when the woman saw that she could not be concealed, she came, trembling, lest he should rebuke her intrusion, and falling down before him, declared the whole transaction. But her fears were groundless. Jesus addressed her by the affectionate appellation of "daughter," and assured her that her cure was the evidence, and happy effect of her faith, by which she had been made whole.

Let us, then, behold in this woman the nature and effects of faith. She had a strong sense of want and helplessness—a confident reliance on the power and efficacy of the person to whom she applied—her application was made in the full expectation, and desire of a cure, and she was not disappointed. If *you* follow her example in spiritual things, you will obtain a cure for your inveterate malady—sin. Go to the Lord Jesus in prayer, with a deep sense of your guilt—with a full reliance on the efficacy of his atoning blood to cleanse you from all sin—and with earnest desire for salvation, as well from the power, as from the punishment of sin, and you too shall be saved. Here is the nature and effect of faith—it is the stretching out of a sinking hand, to him who, we know, is able to support us, and thus it is said, in the Scripture, that believers are "saved by faith." But, remark, that while multitudes thronged and *pressed* our Lord, one woman alone obtained healing virtue, because she alone came by faith, with the desire and expectation of a cure. Learn from this, that while numbers crowd the places where the Gospel is preached, and press into the courts of the Lord's house, only here and there it happens that one and another touch him in humble faith. Christ's death will benefit none, but such as come to him in the way that this woman did; and until *we* thus come to him, and obtain such saving virtue that our lives display the cure, Christ's merits will not avail us any thing—nay, it will increase our condemnation, that we have heard of his redeeming love, without applying to it.

The preceding transaction having occurred as our Lord was on the way to the ruler's house, some delay was necessarily occasioned, and this, no doubt, increased the anxiety of Jairus;

but his trial was much greater, when messengers came to inform him that his daughter had died in the interval. Yet she had not gone beyond the Saviour's power of recall, for having taken three of his disciples—a competent number for witnesses—he entered into the room where the child lay, and with as much ease as he had originally given her life, now restored her to it. Jesus is "the resurrection and the life." He can quicken dead souls, as well as dead bodies. Unless we be raised "to walk in newness of life," we have neither lot nor part in the salvation which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHAP. VI. 1—29.

CHRIST IS CONDEMNED BY HIS COUNTRYMEN—HE SENDS OUT THE TWELVE—MARTYRDOM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing *him* were astonished, saying, From whence hath this *man* these things? and what wisdom *is* this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed *them*. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching. And he called *unto him* the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in *their* purse: But *be* shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed *them*. And king Herod heard *of him;* (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard *thereof*, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief *estates* of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give *it* thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give *it* thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry: *yet* for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard *of it*, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.

In this account of our Lord's last visit to Nazareth, (as it appears to have been,) we find that the people asked, "Is not this *the carpenter?*" whence it has reasonably been concluded that Christ had wrought with Joseph at this laborious business during the former years of his life. Having "for our sakes become poor," he, "the second Adam," submitted to the sentence denounced on the first Adam, and ate his "bread in the sweat of his brow." For this reason, the inhabitants of Nazareth closed their ears to his instruction. We should rather admire and adore the condescension of the incarnate Son of God, who for our sakes "took on him the form of a servant"—and by his gracious example, has sanctified the lowest gradation of life—so that the poor may glorify him as well as the rich and powerful.

The twelve apostles, whom our Lord had previously chosen, are now commissioned to publish the Gospel throughout the country. Many of the directions here given were peculiar to the apostles. They were commanded to cast out devils, and to heal the sick with miraculous power. They used oil to anoint those who had divers diseases—not as a medicine—and much less as the outward part of a sacrament—but rather as an applicatory sign—pointing out where the gift of healing was bestowed. The general tone of Christ's directions to the twelve, may be well applied to the authorized ministers of Christ's word and sacraments. Thus after enforcing rules for self-denial, and dependance on Providence, he sends them forth, "two and two." The wisdom of our Lord in this respect is acknowledged in the present experience of Christian ministers; for who so much needs

counsel and spiritual communion, as the man who labours for immortal souls? and hence Solomon wisely says, "two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up." *

The woe which our Lord denounced upon those who should refuse to hear his messengers, comes home with still more force to us, who live in a time when the reproach of the cross is lessened, and when his Gospel is preached with greater clearness. His ambassadors proclaim peace, and their commission invests them with such authority that all men are bound to listen to them whilst they set forth the way of salvation. They are to declare that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and that they who come to the Lord Jesus shall in no wise be cast out. They are also to declare that holiness is the characteristic of the Christian—the inseparable fruit of genuine faith; but if men who "love darkness rather than light," refuse to come, because they will not part from their sins, a doom more dreadful than that of Sodom awaits them. There is a day coming when the frequent warnings and invitations of God's faithful ministers shall be brought up against the impenitent. Their former stings of conscience which reproved them, and which they hastily suppressed, shall act as witnesses against them, and the books being opened, and the judgment set, they shall receive a sentence of condemnation, which their awakened conscience must approve. Let us rejoice in the glad tidings that there is now in Christ, full, free, and perfect redemption; and that he rejects none who come with an humble, earnest desire of freedom from the power, and pardon from the punishment, of sin.

The martyrdom of John the Baptist next engages our attention. The news respecting Christ, which the apostles had spread through the country, soon reached the ears of Herod the King. It is not easy to meet with a more striking instance than is here recorded, of the force of conscience over a guilty mind; or a stronger proof how perpetually it goads the sinner, not only with well-grounded apprehensions of impending vengeance, but with imaginary terrors and visionary dangers. Herod had been married to the daughter of the king of Arabia, but deserted her, and formed an adulterous connection with his brother Philip's wife. John the Baptist had the honesty and courage, to reproach the tyrant with the enormity of his guilt—he determined

* Eccles. iv. 9, 10.

to do his duty, and take the consequences. Herod, we are told, "observed" John, that is, listened to him with attention and with pleasure; nay, he went further still, "he did many things" which John exhorted him to do: perhaps showed more compassion to the poor, and more regard to public worship, and vainly hoped, like many other audacious sinners, that this partial reformation would avert the judgments with which John threatened him. But the great object of John's reprehension was the incestuous adultery in which he lived, and this he *would* not give up. What a picture does this hold out to us, of that strange thing called human nature! and what an exalted idea does it give, of the dignity of a truly religious character, like that of John, which compels even its bitterest enemies to reverence and to fear it, at the very moment, perhaps, when they are meditating its destruction. How far John might have prevailed over Herod at last, it is impossible to say; but an incident occurred which speedily decided his fate. Herod gave a costly entertainment, at which the daughter of Herodias danced, and so pleased him, that he rashly swore he would comply with any request she made. Here was an opportunity for Herodias to gratify her revenge—she demanded John Baptist's head, and Herod sinfully yielded; the observance of such an oath was worse than the breach of it. Of what avail now was Herod's partial compliance with John's faithful remonstrance? He had done "many things," but yet spared his darling lust. Unless our religion enable us to give up *every known sin*, it is totally worthless, and in such case, we bear the name of Christian, without belonging to the people of Christ.

NOTE v. 27.—*σπεκουλάτωρ.* In Latin, speculator, a guard or sentinel; these were also employed as executioners. The word implies a state of war. So Herod was now at the castle of Machærus engaged in a war with Aretas, king of Arabia, whose daughter he had divorced. See Josephus. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 5. Sec. 1 and 2.

CHAP. VI. 30—56.

JESUS SEEKS RETIREMENT—FEEDS THE MULTITUDE—WALKS ON THE SEA TO HIS DISCIPLES.

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. And

the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things. And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time *is* far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave *them* to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men. And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not *the miracle* of the loaves: for their heart was hardened. And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

JESUS now invited his disciples to retire with him into a desert place, that they might, with him, enjoy a season of meditation and secret prayer. Observe, the Christian's rest is to come out from the world, and to retire with his Saviour in secret. Whatever his state of life be, or whatever difficulties harass and perplex him, he has a secret chamber to go to, where he can unbosom his cares, and roll them upon that all-sufficient Saviour, who is ever present at such seasons as these. Do you know what it is to retire in this manner, and for this purpose? Have you ever answered the Saviour, when he says to you, "come

apart, and rest awhile?" Perhaps you go into the world for rest, and try to get rid of the cares of your mind, by a draught of its pleasure. Alas! you know not the true remedy for care: *this* may answer for the moment, but it will leave you more distressed in the end. Follow the example of Jesus—go apart from the crowd who are coming and going—from the busy, bustling scene around—enter into your closet—shut to your door, and pour out your soul in prayer—tell your every want and complaint to the compassionate Jesus; in this manner you will find true and lasting rest, and the more you try it, the oftener will you wish to repeat it.

What a pleasure is it to see persons so anxious for instruction, as the people at this time seemed to be! They had witnessed our Lord's departure, and though he had crossed the lake in a boat, yet did their desire for instruction give such speed to their journey, that they had reached the opposite shore on foot, before the boat had arrived. By so doing they interrupted our Lord's retirement; but was he angry on this account, as some would be, when their schemes are marred? No, his compassionate heart was moved with pity; he saw they were in earnest, when they travelled so far, and so fast, and immediately "he began to teach them many things." Another incident is mentioned which proves the anxiety of these persons for instruction; their zeal overcame what, some would say, was their better judgment, and they ran, without thinking of the distance they were going—the time of the day—or the impossibility of procuring provisions in a desert place. Have we any zeal like this? If our bodies had as often been left without food, as our souls have been, they would long since have died of starvation. Job says, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." * The soul can no more live without food than the body, and therefore those souls, which are not daily nourished by prayer and the Scriptures, are dead. Our Lord seemed determined that these earnest inquirers should not only get what they came for, but should have even more than they expected. Their bodily wants had been forgotten by themselves, but not by him, for he supplied them. They "sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and other things were added to them." None shall ever suffer loss who make any sacrifice for Christ's sake: "he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think.'

But though our Lord had been interrupted, did he forget his

* Job xxiii. 12.

retirement? By no means. "He *constrained* his disciples to get into the ship," and having sent them to sea, remained behind, *alone*, after the multitude was dismissed. "When he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray." Happy souls, who have had that Spirit put within them, which enables them to copy their Master in this love of retirement for prayer: they there taste a joy, as far superior to the choicest pleasures of the worldly, as the joys of heaven can exceed those of earth; and truly so, for their joy is heavenly.

After this season of retirement, our blessed Lord returned to his disciples, not in the ordinary way, but miraculously "walking upon the sea." He first stood upon the shore, and saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary. Many a toilsome hour do the people of the Lord spend, struggling against the waves of this world, while the storms of adversity seem ready to sink them in the deep. Is this your case? Be not alarmed—there is help at hand—Jesus stands on the shore watching you, and even pleading for you when the waves are raging high; he will come in a moment that you least expect, and speak these waves into a perfect calm. While in this world, you are liable to repeated storms; but these will serve as trials of your faith; rejoice, that there is a haven before you, where all is calm and tranquillity; there is not a ruffle upon that sea of heavenly rest, nor shall an adverse breath of wind ever disturb your repose.

CHAP. VII.

THE PHARISEES REPROVED—DEPRAVITY OF THE HUMAN HEART—THE CANAANITE'S DAUGHTER HEALED—THE DEAF AND DUMB HEALED.

Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the Scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and Scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the wash-

ing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is* Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free.* And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. And when he had called all the people *unto him*, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one *of you*, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it* cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know *it:* but he could not be hid. For a *certain* woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed. And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came into the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published *it;* And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

THE Jewish traditions which our Lord opposed, were certain observances of rites and ceremonies, handed down from father to son, which the Jews supposed had been delivered by Moses, though not contained in his writings, and which they regarded as of equal authority with the written word of God. Of such

our Lord says: "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions;" and again: "in vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Let those persons who add any thing to the written word of God, and those, too, who observe such human additions, carefully consider the threatenings of the Lord, declared at the end of the Bible: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." *

Jesus then turning from the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he had been addressing, next applied himself to the multitude—the poor and illiterate crowd that surrounded him, and in a forcible manner exposed the errors of their false teachers, even within their hearing. He tells them that what they had heard from these teachers, was not agreeable to the word of God—that pollution, or uncleanness, did not spring from the neglect of human impositions, such as eating with unwashed, hands, or eating one kind of food, and abstaining from another, but that the true source of all iniquity was that *evil heart* which dwells in every man, and from which, as from a polluted fountain, all the streams of sin and error flow. Who can read that black catalogue of vices which our Lord details as flowing from the heart of man, and afterwards speak of *the goodness* of the human heart? It is true some persons may have more natural kindness, benevolence, and amiability than others; but no one who knows his own heart, will ever call the heart of another *good*. The apostle Paul describes himself in a very different way: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." † The hearts of all, without distinction, are naturally corrupt. These hearts must be changed by the renewing influence of God's Holy Spirit—the love of sin must be dethroned, and the love of holiness exalted in its place; yet still the Christian is conscious of so much imperfection, that he groans under the hardness of his heart, and longs for that glorious rest where he shall be perfectly free from all impure thoughts, desires, and inclinations.

Jesus having arrived in that part of Galilee which bordered on Tyre and Sidon, went into a house, desirous of avoiding the multitude for a time; but his fame had spread so far, that he could not remain in concealment. A poor woman, whose

* Rev. xxii. 18, 19. † Rom. vii. 18. ‡ Jer. xvii. 9.

distress was such as no human power could relieve, came to him. "She heard of him, and came and fell at his feet." What made this woman's application to Christ the more remarkable, was that she did not belong to the Jewish nation, and therefore could not be expected to know much of him: but her conduct shamed those Jews who rejected him, and her faith will rise in judgment against them. There are numbers of the poor heathen in the present day, who hear of Jesus from the faithful missionary, and rejoice in the blessings of the Gospel, who may well shame nominal Christians, and who, from the improvement of scanty opportunities, will rise to condemn those of us, who squander our privileges, and who, living in the midst of plenty, suffer our souls to die of starvation. This Gentile woman was sensible that she had nothing to claim from Jesus, and although, in order to try her faith, he seemed to disregard her, yet did she earnestly beg for the crumbs of mercy that might fall from the tables of the more favoured Jews. Nor did she beg in vain. Her request was, that the devil might be cast out of her daughter, and that request was granted. The greatest blessing that parents can ask for their children is, that the Lord Jesus would break the power of sin in their hearts—that he would cast out the *unclean spirit*, and make their hearts the temple of his Holy Spirit. Let such parents as desire this portion for their children, be encouraged in their application to the Saviour. He may seem to neglect their prayers for a season, but in due time "they shall reap if they faint not."

Among the many prophecies of Christ, it had been foretold, that by his power "the ears of the deaf should be unstopped," "and the tongue of the dumb sing,"* and now this prophecy was fulfilled. "There was brought to him a man who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech," and after a simple process, which would have been quite inefficient in other hands, "his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. The internal impediments to the receiving of the Gospel, can be as effectually removed by the Spirit of Christ, as those bodily impediments were by the word of his power. He can open the heart as he did Lydia's, and thereby the ear will be open to receive his word,† and the mouth to speak in prayer and praise. Better would it be for us to have been born deaf and dumb, than having the use of our hearing—to hear the Gospel in vain; or the use of speech—to abuse it

* Isaiah xxxv. 5, 6. † Acts xvi. 14, 15.

by idle and sinful conversation, or not to employ it in the service of the Lord.

CHAP. VIII. 1—26.

CHRIST FEEDETH THE PEOPLE MIRACULOUSLY—THE BLIND MAN BROUGHT TO CHRIST—SIGHT RESTORED TO HIM.

In those days, the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these *men* with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before *them;* and they did set *them* before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before *them*. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left, seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away. And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. And he left them, and, entering into the ship again, departed to the other side. Now *the disciples* had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and *of* the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew *it*, he saith unto them, Why reason ye because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand? And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought? And he looked up, and said, I see men, as trees, walking. After that he put *his* hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell *it* to any in the town.

THE bounty of Christ is inexhaustible, and to evidence that, he repeated a miracle, which, more than others, is calculated to

show his people that they shall never want; for "in him all fulness dwells." It was but a short time since we heard of a miraculous supply having been provided for his congregation in a desert place: but much as we admire their diligent attention, even to the neglect of their temporal wants, the zeal of the persons here mentioned, far surpassed theirs:—"they had now been with him three days, and had nothing to eat." Let not the Pharisees then say that Christ's disciples fast not: they would rather let their bodies want food, than be deprived of their Lord's instruction. True zeal makes nothing of hardships in the way of duty, and slender provision will satisfy the Christian, who is anxious to partake of a spiritual feast. Jesus "had compassion on the multitude;" he could not find in his heart to send them empty away: and is his heart less tender and affectionate now? does he look with less concern on those who long for instruction, and endure privations for the sake of it? undoubtedly not; he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" he has said, "wait on the Lord," be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart," * and sooner shall the foundations of the earth be removed, than one of his words fail. Therefore "wait on the Lord," and be assured that whatever losses you may sustain, or hardships you may undergo in your search after truth, you shall be more than repaid, in the pleasure which the acquisition will provide.

The miracle which our Lord wrought, in restoring sight to this blind man, is recorded by St. Mark alone. The circumstances which attended it were somewhat singular. It does not appear that the man himself showed any anxiety for, or expectation of, a cure, as other blind men did. He was taken *by his friends;* the faith was theirs—the request was theirs, and the Saviour acted upon it. This holds out an encouraging example to parents and members of a Christian Church, to present their children to God in baptism—the latter cannot exercise faith and repentance for themselves, but they should be dedicated to the Lord in this initiatory and solemn sacrament, and a blessing may be expected, where faith and prayer are used in their behalf. It also affords an instructive and consoling lesson to those persons who are mourning over the spiritual blindness of their dear relatives or friends. They may show no concern for their state—no anxiety about religion—no love for the Saviour—nay, they may even reject, or ridicule, the kindest admoni-

* Psalm xxvii. 14.

tions. Do any of you suffer under a trial of this nature? Be comforted. *You* know their state, and the power of Jesus to heal. Carry them in the arms of faith—lay them, in prayer, at the feet of Jesus—ask him to restore their sight; and thus you may benefit them unknown to themselves.

Another remarkable circumstance attending this miracle was, that it was done gradually. After the first process of anointing the man's eyes, our Lord inquired "if he saw ought." "He looked up and said, I see men, as trees, walking:" again, our Lord put his hands upon his eyes to disperse the remaining darkness, and then bade him look up, and "he saw every man clearly."* Thus Christ would show us in what method those are healed by his grace, who by nature are spiritually blind: He must remove the scales from the mind's eye and command the light of the Holy Spirit to shine into the heart. The meanest instruments may be employed for this purpose, and any thing in Christ's hands will be effectual. The knowledge of the person is at first confused; he sees "men, as trees, walking;" but the light of the Spirit, like the light of the morning, "shines more and more unto the perfect day," and then he sees all things clearly. He clearly sees his own lost state, and clearly sees the Saviour. Let us inquire if we see ought of spiritual things; has our natural blindness been removed? If not, Christ is at hand to heal us, and if, through grace, the work has commenced, we may trust that we shall see yet more and more, for Christ will perfect his own work.

The Lord commanded this man when restored to sight, to go to his own home and not to publish it in the town. The reason of this seems to be, that Bethsaida had rejected the word of the Lord, and therefore was now justly denied a fresh opportunity of hearing of the Redeemer's wonderful works. It might be also, that our Lord thought this man was unfit to be a witness for him until further instruction was given to him, and therefore he would rather send him to meditate and pray. "Retirement of one sort or another is, as it were, necessary after conversion. When a man has once received the knowledge of the truth, he must long meditate upon it in private, feed, and in silence let it take deep root in his heart before he speaks of it. There is an eagerness to impart it to others, which does not proceed from

* Τηλαυγῶς—a compound word, signifying *clear* and *far*, which are the qualities of perfect sight. Theophylact says, that the blind man's want of faith induced our Lord to cure him by degrees, not *in* the city, for Bethsaida was under a woe.—Matt. xi. 21.

God, and may be prejudicial to beginners." * Let us remember that zeal to be useful must be tempered with knowledge, and follow implicitly the guidance of God.

CHAP. VIII. 27—38.

CHRIST PREDICTETH HIS SUFFERINGS—URGETH TO BOLDNESS AND FIDELITY.

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some *say*, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and *of* the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed; and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. And when he had called the people *unto him*, with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

THE wisdom of our blessed Lord was remarkable, in suiting his instruction to the strength of his disciples. When the time came that they should hear of his sufferings, he did not conceal it. Peter, although foremost in making a confession of his divinity, soon betrayed his ignorance, for he "rebuked" the Saviour when he spoke of his sufferings, as if it were beneath his dignity. We may feel surprised that Peter should be still ignorant of our Lord's approaching death and sufferings—especially after making such a clear confession of his person. We must remember, however, that the apostles only received Christ's revelation by degrees, and were not infallible teachers until the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus gave him a sharp rebuke for the very purpose of shewing that men would make fatal mistakes in religion without the guidance of

* See Quesnell on St. Mark.

his own Spirit. He even calls Peter by the name of Satan, because this great adversary of God and man was unwilling that Christ should suffer and the race of man be saved—so far then as Peter was unwilling that Christ should suffer, so far he savoured of the things of Satan and of carnal men and deserved to be called an adversary. Ill would it have been, both for Peter and for us, had Jesus shrunk from his arduous task. But he did not—the cup of suffering which was put into his hand, he drank to the very dregs. And as he, their master, suffered, so must his disciples likewise expect sorrow.—"Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Those who expect to share the blessings of Christ's kingdom, must share his sufferings now, not indeed in the same way—his were propitiatory sorrows—their's, to prove and purify them. He paid the penalty due to our sins—his disciples suffer the rod of fatherly correction. Every Christian has a cross of some kind to bear, either inwardly or outwardly; but the more he keeps his journey's end in view, the less shall he suffer from the weight of his cross. Let us only bear in mind the inestimable value of the soul, and we shall count the sufferings of this state as nothing in comparison with the glory that shall be revealed.* No one can adequately prize the eternity of joy promised to God's people; yet millions lose their souls for the sake of the most trivial gain, or the most worthless indulgence, as the price at which Satan purchases their souls. Indulged sin may be pleasant now, but it will cause unutterable woe when the never-dying worm of remorse shall gnaw the mind with the bitter reflection, that for a momentary gratification, the soul has been lost beyond the power of recovery.

See then what you are to expect, if you would be Christ's true disciples. Cast your accounts before hand, what the profession of Christ will cost thee. It is good wisdom to prepare before hand for that which must come. If we will be true Christians, the cross must come to us and we must come to it, yea we must come under it; every one of us in our time and measure—we must endure not one or few, but many and grievous troubles both outward and inward. If we follow Christ, we must go the same way which he went before us—the way of the cross to the kingdom of glory.†

The last verse of this chapter speaks forcibly to those who

* Rom. viii. 18. † See Petter on St. Mark.

allow the fear of man to damp their zeal, and who hold back from real and hearty decision in the cause of God. It is not possible to be faithful to Christ, and at the same time to avoid the censures of the world. The only alternative is, to "be faithful unto death," or to lose his favor. The fearful and unbelieving must take their portion together in the lake of fire and brimstone. Let us then beseech of God to endue us with courage, that we may "set our faces like a flint" against the "sinful generation" in which we live. Let us pray that with the apostle Paul, each of us may be enabled to say—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ—for it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth." We shall then rather glory that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake, and that we are honoured in being thus conformed to his sufferings.*

CHAP. IX. 1—29.

JESUS IS TRANSFIGURED—HIS ATTENDANTS ON THE MOUNT—THE FATHER'S TESTIMONY—A DEAF AND DUMB SPIRIT CAST OUT.

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles: one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say: for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son; hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, that Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him. And when he came to *his* disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to *him* saluted him. And

* Acts v. 41.

he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit: And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him and saith, O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child: And oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him; but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said, with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, *Thou* dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And *the spirit* cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting.

THE event of our Lord's transfiguration is capable of yielding us important instruction in many particulars. The apostles had seen their Master daily, in "the form of a servant," and as the Son of man; but on this occasion they "beheld his glory—the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father," and had such a discovery of him, in the form of God, as they were not able to sustain. His disguise was, as it were, laid aside, and he appeared like himself—"the Sun of Righteousness;" shining forth from behind those clouds which commonly obscured his splendour. "The fashion of his countenance was altered," and "did shine as the sun." The glorious appearance of Christ was calculated to give the apostles some faint conception of his divine majesty, and this vision on the mount of transfiguration, would serve to support their faith, when called to witness the horrors of Mount Calvary.

Two attendants from the invisible world—Moses and Elias, wait upon their master. They too came in glory, but their glory was only borrowed from the Saviour. It was inferior to his, as the planets are less resplendent than the noon-day sun, from which they derive their lustre, and by whose beams they are eclipsed. Moses was the great law-giver of Israel, and Elijah the chief of the prophets, but they both came to lay down their commissions at the Redeemer's feet, in whose person, and obedience unto death, the moral law was magnified—the

ceremonial types were fulfilled—and the prophecies were accomplished. Thus Moses and Elijah bare witness with the apostles, that Jesus would come in power and great glory—and thus the law, the prophets, and the gospel light, all direct us to Jesus as the bright and morning Star—at whose second coming the kingdom of Messiah shall be set forth in all its fulness.* Such pleasure did this glorious sight impart to the three apostles who were with him on the mount, that Peter, who spoke for the rest, begged that they might be allowed to remain where they were. But though there was a great deal of ignorance and error in this rash request of Peter's, yet may we learn much from it. His pleasure on the mount, made him forget all earthly connections. Just so is it with the person who, by faith, has seen the glory of Jesus. He then discovers an importance—a reality in religion, that he never saw before, and his whole thoughts are so absorbed in the subject—the danger he has escaped, and the joy he has obtained—that earthly things lose their influence. He once enjoyed the world's pleasures, but it was during his night of ignorance. Now, "the day-spring from on high hath visited him," the knowledge of a Saviour, and the pleasure of spiritual communion, with him, entirely eclipse the former objects of his choice, and he gladly exchanges all that he formerly held dear, for the possession of this newly-discovered treasure. Recollect, that reason, as well as revelation, approve such a choice, while both condemn those who prefer the mire of this earth to the glorious views on the mount of Communion.

In addition to the glorious majesty of the Lord Jesus on the mount, there came a voice from heaven which attested his divinity—God the Father declared him to be his "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." Well might the disciples fall on their faces, and "be sore afraid." But if they who were his friends and associates, trembled at his glory, what terror and dismay shall seize his enemies, when he comes again in the clouds of heaven, not with *two* attendants, but with ten thousand of his saints, "to be admired in all them that believe," and to take vengeance on those who loved the world in preference to him!

After our Lord's glory had disappeared, and he was come down from the mount, he found his disciples busily engaged in disputation with the Scribes, who, it would seem, had taken advan-

* See the Comments of the inspired apostle on our Lord's transfiguration, 2 Peter i. 16—19.

tage of their Master's absence, to perplex them in their conversation. He inquired the subject of dispute, but it does not appear that any reply was given to his question; upon which, a person present took advantage of the silence, to plead in behalf of his child, who was possessed with an evil spirit, which deprived him of speech and hearing; and this he did the more anxiously, as he had failed in obtaining assistance from the disciples, to whom he had previously applied. Our Lord attributed their failure to a deficiency in their faith, and states that such an inveterate case as this, could not be removed without more than ordinary exercise in private devotion and self-denial. Upon this he manifested his superior power by commanding the unclean spirit to depart, and it obeyed him. The expressions of earnest entreaty which this parent used in behalf of his son, may furnish prayers for such parents as are anxious for the spiritual improvement of their children—"Master, I have brought unto thee my son." "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." "He cried out, and said with tears—Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." These supplications were not despised—the Lord heard and answered;—what an encouragement for the children of want and sorrow to plead with the compassionate High Priest of our profession!

CHAP. IX. 30—50.

CHRIST EXHORTS HIS DISCIPLES TO HUMILITY—BIDS THEM NOT TO PROHIBIT SUCH AS ARE NOT AGAINST HIM—NOR TO GIVE OFFENCE TO WEAK BELIEVERS.

And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know *it*. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him. And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house, he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who *should be* the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me. And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our

part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, He shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend one of *these* little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire; Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

NOTHING can be more contrary to the two great laws of Christ's kingdom, which are, *humility* and *love*, than *desiring* preferment in the world, and *disputing* about it. Yet were the disciples guilty of both. Our Lord privately inquired what it was that they disputed among themselves by the way. He knew very well what it was, but he would have them confess their fault and folly; "but they held their peace," ashamed to own their pride, and, as if to mark his displeasure at any assumption of authority by one over the rest, "he sat down and called the twelve, and saith unto them, if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." This proves, beyond a doubt, that there was no chief, or prince among the apostles—that PETER was not chief, and therefore that the man who claims a title to authority over all churches, upon the ground of Peter's supremacy, builds without a shadow of authority from Scripture; he may claim for himself the title of Universal Bishop, but he only seals his own condemnation, for "if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." If there was to be any *primacy* among the apostles, why was Christ, on this occasion, silent respecting it? or if he had, in the hearing of the others, conferred it on Peter, what occasion could there have been for the apostles to dispute about it? The person who shall be highest in the kingdom of Christ, is he who is lowest in his own estimation. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Although the disciples were ashamed to own their contests for preferment, yet they seemed willing to assume authority on ac-

count of their office, and even to boast of their exercise of it. "Master," says John, "we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not us." Our Lord's reply is well worth the careful consideration of those, who would confine salvation to their own narrow views—"Forbid him not"—"he that is not against us, is on our part." Our opposition should only be against those who oppose the Lord Jesus, and not against those who differ with us on non-essential matters; and we should not hinder any who are labouring to destroy the kingdom of Satan, *though they follow not us.* John acted as Joshua once did, concerning Eldad and Medad, who prophesied in the camp, and went not up with the rest to the door of the tabernacle. He said, "My Lord Moses, forbid them: and Moses said unto him, enviest thou for my sake? Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them."* Moses rebuked the same spirit in Joshua which our Lord did in John. We are too apt to imagine that those do not follow Christ at all, who do not follow him *with us*, and that they do nothing well, who do not just as we do. This instance may give us a needful caution not to cultivate unity for the sake of maintaining a party spirit, nor too hastily to condemn others, if they do not precisely walk in our path. The passage does not encourage schism or needless divisions, but teaches us to cherish toleration towards others who may differ from us; we should be faithful to Christ without harshness, and charitable without compromise.†

The solemn warnings which are contained in the latter part of this chapter, seem to have arisen out of the carnal expectations of the apostles, which led them into many mistakes both of judgment and practice; but, though primarily addressed to them, *we* are deeply interested in the instruction which they convey. Our Lord would have us to know that all evil propensities must be mortified and cut off, and this he illustrates by the common practice of cutting off a diseased member, in order to the saving of a person's life. Various are the objects of temptation around us; yea, the very things which were intended by Providence for our furtherance in religion, are converted by sin to the very opposite purpose. But whatever interferes with our spiritual improvement, must at once be removed. Do our *interests* betray us

* Numb. xi. 28, 29.

† Christ's speech in the defence of him that did the miracles, tendeth not to approve of all as his real friends, who are not open enemies, but he denieth that they do rightly, which by any means *hinder* the propagation of the kingdom of God.—*Calvin.*

into sin? Are we engaged in any trade or calling, which we cannot follow without doing what the word of God and our own consciences condemn; or, have we prospects in life which must be sacrificed if we follow the Lord fully? There must be no hesitation on this point; we must pluck out our right eye, and cut off the right hand, and cast them from us with abhorrence, rather than suffer them to warp our judgment, or defile our conscience. As there is nothing which will compensate for the loss of our souls, so should we allow nothing to stand between us and the commands of God. It is not man, but God, that requires these things, and he has promised that his grace shall be sufficient for us. Let each of us say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The future anguish of those who sell their souls for some present gratification, is strongly painted in the concluding verses, "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Doubtless, remorse of conscience, and keen self-reflection, constitute this never-dying worm—the gnawing self-reproach for convictions slighted—warnings disregarded—opportunities irrecoverably lost; and all, as lasting as are the pleasures of the redeemed. "Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice "shall be salted with salt." The sacrifices under the law were commanded to be salted with salt.* This was an emblem of grace, which renders the sanctified soul meet for the enjoyment of its incorruptible inheritance. The text declares also, that "every one shall be salted with fire," which seems to refer to the wicked, and the word "salted" would imply the incorruptible nature of the tormenting fire.† Let us seek that grace which prepares for unchangeable glory, and dread sin, which will cast so many into the unquenchable fire.

CHAP. X. 1—31.

TOUCHING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCEMENT—CHRIST BLESSETH YOUNG CHILDREN —THE YOUNG RULER INSTRUCTED—DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD REQUIRED.

And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was

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* Lev. ii. 13.

† By *salt* (says Bede) understand the spirit of wisdom and grace; and by *fire*, tribulation, whereby the patience of the faithful is exercised, that they may have a perfect work. Chrysostom takes the same view of this difficult verse. But see Lightfoot and Whitby in defence of the view given above.

wont, he taught them again. And the Pharisees came to him and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away *his* wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put *her* away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept: But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same *matter*. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery. And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*. But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them. And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men *it is* impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life. But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

HUMAN depravity has deranged the appointments of the all-wise Creator, and perverted them to the introduction of accumulated misery: but the Gospel of Christ, when it acts influentially on the heart, teaches men to "deny ungodliness and worldly

lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." The sacred energy of true religion renders men affectionate relatives and faithful friends, and effectually operates in destroying all those evil tempers, which are so destructive to the peace of domestic harmony. Happy is it to see those who are united by the ties of marriage, drawn together by the still stronger bonds of grace; and we may fearlessly assert, that if the power of true religion were more generally felt, there would be less occasion for those *permissions* to dissolve the sacred contract, which are, at times, unhappily requested.

The conduct of those persons who brought their children to the Saviour for his blessing, is recorded for the imitation of all parents: for what should they so much wish for their children, as to place them in the arms of Jesus, and find room for them in his fold. Christ has informed us, "of *such* is the kingdom of God." This is true in a double sense: little children brought in faith to baptism are regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's church. And *they* are truly members of Christ, who receive the kingdom of God in child-like humility. No passage can be more encouraging on the subject of infant baptism, for we "perceive how by his outward gesture and deed, Christ declared his good-will towards them; for he embraced them in his arms: he laid his hands upon them and blessed them." * The parent who seeks for his children the blessings of religion, and whose efforts are crowned with success, has the happiness of knowing that they are placed above the uncertainties of life, that they have an unfading treasure—a principle which will regulate them in prosperity, and support them in adversity.

It is never known what a man is, till he is tried; this is strikingly manifest in the case before us: a young man came running to our Lord, which proved his anxiety; he had been a strict observer of the moral precepts, so that he was considered to be a most amiable character, and so far our Lord was pleased with him, and even said to love him. Thus he might have passed for the most excellent of human beings, had he not been brought to the touchstone, and suffered to manifest the real disposition of his heart. But after enumerating all the commandments which he fancied he had blamelessly kept, our Lord told him that one thing was wanting—that he must sell all his possessions, and give them to the poor. This was a trial which he

* See the Exhortation in the Ministration of Public Baptism of Infants. Book of Common Prayer.

could not stand. It must be confessed that the command was difficult to obey—to exchange wealth for poverty—ease for trouble—and homage, for contempt. But was it unreasonable? No; from whom had he received his wealth? and had not God a right to recall what he had only lent? had not God as much right to disperse his wealth among the poor, as he before had to accumulate it upon one single man? Our Lord's reason for subjecting him to this trial was, to convince him of his sins and short-comings in the view of God's holy law. It is remarkable that Christ tried him by the second table of the commandments —which contains man's duty to his neighbour; and by his not selling all and distributing his property to the poor, it shewed that he neither loved God *perfectly*, nor his neighbour *as* himself. So soon does God convict us of sin, when tried by this perfect standard of right and wrong. Our Lord's command filled him with grief: "he was sad at that saying;" he was grieved at the strictness of the precept. "He had great possessions," and could not prevail upon himself to part with them. His riches were his idol; had he been called on to sacrifice *a part* of his property, he would, probably, have acquiesced in the command, but to bereave himself of *all*—to reduce himself to a state of poverty for Christ's sake, this he could not comply with. Such is the state of many at this time; they would gladly make *some* sacrifices to obtain spiritual blessings, but to renounce the world—to mortify their lusts—and to bring upon themselves nothing but contempt and persecution, appears too great a sacrifice, and they hope to get to heaven upon easier terms. The young man "went away grieved;" much as he revered the Lord Jesus, and wished to partake of his salvation, he could not continue with him on such terms as these. The price was too high for him, and therefore he turned his back upon him. Unhappy youth! how much better would it have been for him, if he had been born in a low estate! what a curse to him were his riches, which stood between him and the Saviour!

Judging from this young man's case, how dangerous must the state of many be who think themselves safe. He went to a great extent of reverence for Christ—he appeared to be desirous of eternal life—but "one thing he lacked," and thus came short of the blessing. O that those who pride themselves on their outward morality, without a deep sense of sin, or a simple dependance on the strength of Christ, would consider this case and take warning from his example. Every one is not called to the same test as he was, viz. to sell all they have and give to the poor, but

there must be in every Christian such a love for the Saviour, and for his commands, that, if placed in such circumstances as would require him to part with all earthly treasures and connections, rather than break his laws, he should *at once* obey. Let no Christian fear to make any sacrifice for Christ's sake—he can make all grace to abound, and if he does not recompense in one way, he will in another—by giving *contentment*, which, with godliness, is great gain; and above all, by bestowing the treasure which waxeth not old, even eternal life. Let any one who has made a sacrifice for the Gospel's sake, say, whether he has not received "an hundred fold" greater than all he ever derived from the possession of earthly comforts, even in their richest abundance?

CHAP. X. 32—52.

JAMES AND JOHN SEEK THE HIGHEST PLACES IN CHRIST'S KINGDOM—BARTIMÆUS RESTORED TO SIGHT.

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him. *Saying*, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Barti-

mæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, *thou* son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, *Thou* son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

NOTWITHSTANDING the clear declaration which our Lord made of his approaching sufferings and death, his disciples still expected that he would establish a temporal kingdom. Though he had spoken of his being crucified, yet as he had talked also of his "rising again the third day," they conceived that he spoke only of some transient trials which would issue in a complete triumph over all his enemies. They remembered that promise which he had very recently given them, that they should at a future period "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," * and they concluded that it must relate to some temporal dominion. Emboldened by this, we find that James and John presumed to ask that they might be invested with the two highest places of dignity and power in his kingdom.† Alas! how artfully did Satan blind their eyes and delude their hearts—how stange that they should desire such things, when our Lord had but just told them that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven!" He tells them that the places they sought for, must be disposed of according to the sovereign will of God, but that advancement in his spiritual kingdom was to be obtained by the discipline of conflicts and afflictions. It is not by mere request that any person can arrive at eminence in the divine life. Perfect as the Lord Jesus was, "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered,"‡ and "was made perfect through sufferings;" and so in like manner must all his people: hence he put the question to them, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am

* Matt. xix. 28.

† The Talmudical writers say that in the Sanhedrin, the Nasi, or President, had two officers of distinction—one on either side. He who sat on the right was called Ab Beth Din, or father of the justiciary; and he who sat on the left, was called, Chacham, or the sage. Doddridge thinks it probable that the sons of Zebedee had this in view.

‡ Heb. v. 8.

baptized with?" In answer to this, the two disciples, without hesitation, affirmed that they could suffer any extremity for him. But what presumption was this! and how unjustly they estimated their own powers, was soon manifest, when, upon our Lord's apprehension in the garden, they "all forsook him and fled." Thus will it be with us if we attempt to do any thing in our own strength, we shall soon find that we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, much less to do or suffer any thing.

The corruption of the heart, like fire in the flint, generally lies concealed, till by a collision with some particular circumstance it is elicited; and then it comes forth with a power capable of producing the most fatal effects. Till James and John made this request of our Lord for preferment in his kingdom, the other ten disciples appeared content with any lot that might be assigned them; but when they had reason to apprehend that their more aspiring brethren might be placed above them, they were filled with indignation against them, and were ready to dispute and quarrel with them for precedency. Then they showed that they themselves were as much actuated by ambition as the others, and were quite as averse to yield as the others were anxious to obtain, the highest place of dignity and power. Let not any one think well of himself, or imagine that the evil spark does not exist in his breast; particular circumstances may have kept him out of temptation's way, but the seeds of passion, lust, revenge, and the like, lie deeply seated within, liable to break out on some sudden temptation, except the grace of God keeps the heart, and takes from sin its fatal influence. The ambition of which the disciples were guilty, is a sin common to human nature. Many would not, perhaps, utter the sentiments so plainly as they did, but they indulge the desire; they long for some advancement in life—somewhat more of honour, or power, or wealth; as soon as any elevation in the world appears to be within their reach, they immediately find a drawing of heart towards it: all, from the prince to the beggar, are influenced by the love of the world, until the grace of God teaches them to set their affections on things above, and not on the earth.*

This chapter closes with an account of our Lord's miraculously curing a blind man.—"He sat by the highway begging," and there he heard that Jesus passed by. But hearing of Christ was

* Col. iii. 2.

not enough for him, he longed to see him, and would not lose the present opportunity of trying to gain his object; and it was well he did not, for we do not find that Jesus ever came to Jericho again. It is good to improve the present opportunity; none so favourable may ever occur. This poor man's petition is a model of prayer for us; first, his importunity; he cried as one in earnest: cold petitions always bring denials. Secondly, his humility—"have mercy on me"—not specifying the favour, much less pleading merit: he asks not for silver and gold, though he was poor, but for *mercy*. Thirdly, his faith—evidenced by the title he gave to Christ—"Jesus, thou son of David." It is of much use in prayer to keep in mind the Saviour's character, that as David's son he became man, and in this state can feel for our infirmities and compassionate our wants. And fourthly—his perseverance in prayer, notwithstanding discouragement. "Many charged him that he should hold his peace."—They rebuked him as noisy and clamorous. So may we expect to meet with hindrances, and manifold discouragements, from within, and from without—something or other continually telling us to hold our peace; but let us copy the perseverance of this poor blind man; the more they rebuked him, the more earnestly he prayed, nor did he pray in vain, for Jesus will soon succour those who are under the frown, and rebuke, and contempt of men. "He stood still, and commanded him to be called." Happy moment for the poor sufferer—he is asked what he wishes, he begs for his eye-sight, and it is immediately restored. We would say to each of you who read this narrative—"Rise, the Saviour calleth you." He even says, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" May the Lord give you the inclination to choose the "good part, which shall not be taken from you," and may each of you be enabled to say of Jesus, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee." *

CHAP. XI. 1—10.

CHRIST'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be

* Job xlii. 5.

entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring *him*. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed *them* in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed *be* the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

THE close of our Redeemer's life draws near: we here read of his last visit to Jerusalem. He is now presented to us as hastening on to the hour of great sorrow. As the Lamb of God—the great appointed propitiation, he comes to present himself at the place of sacrifice. This is an example of divine love; men are not wont to deliver themselves up to death for their enemies. It is thus, O Saviour, that thou introducest into the world a new philosophy—which consists in the following of the cross—the contempt of life, and the desire of death. Lord, let this spirit fill the hearts of thy people and thus make them ready to give themselves to thee and for thee.* This entry into Jerusalem is called his triumphal one, but how far from human grandeur was this exhibition! it was accompanied with every external mark of meanness, as if to stamp vanity on the pompous retinue of mortal kings and conquerors. The Creator of the world enters Jerusalem seated upon an ass's colt —the multitude formed his train of attendants—their clothes, the trappings of the animal which carried him. Yet was he the Saviour of the world also, and therefore his mean externals agreed well with the glory of his grace—yea, even some symptoms of the Godhead appeared. He showed his foreknowledge and omniscience by the circumstantial detail of all that should occur when the disciples were sent before him—he showed his omnipotence in making an animal tame and tractable which never before was subject to restraint. Let us picture this scene to our mind's eye: the Son of God the King of Israel, thus proceeding towards Jerusalem, and the people shouting with acclamation, "Hosannah! † blessed is he that cometh in the name

* See Quesnel on this text.

† "Hosannah," is a Hebrew word, rendered in Psalm cxviii. 25, "save now"; a form of ascribing salvation to the Lord. If the ascription of praise to King

of the Lord." Let us, in the spirit, go forth with them, and join in the sublime though simple song. Let us welcome him into our hearts! Let us echo it back! "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." But alas! these transports were only raised by the hopes of a temporal kingdom, and when these hopes were disappointed, those effusions of joy were turned into rage. Would that there were none who follow Christ now from the same motive; but it is too plain that many who are under the engagements of a Christian, nay, of a ministerial profession, proclaim Christ with great appearance of zeal, and yet their chief object is, to exalt themselves. The Lord indeed gave them, by this entry into Jerusalem, a faint idea of that glorious triumph which shall attend his second coming—"when he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne." *

How glorious shall the Son of God then appear. No longer the man of sorrows—exposed to the malice of Satan and the wrath of man for our sakes—and seldom hearing the glad Hosannah addressed to him. He shall then take possession of his own throne—the reward of his sufferings. Thousands and tens of thousands of the angelic hosts and glorified saints shall grace his triumph; the joyful Alleluia, shall fill heaven and earth. The multitude which no man can number shall never grow weary in ascribing hosannah to the Son of David.

CHAP. XI. 11—33.

CURSES THE BARREN FIG-TREE—PURGETH THE TEMPLE—EXHORTETH TO PRAYER AND FAITH—MAINTAINS HIS AUTHORITY BY REFERENCE TO JOHN.

And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve. And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry; And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard *it*. And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry *any* vessel through the temple. And he taught,

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Messiah by this multitude was striking, what shall it be when uttered by the voices of the multitude that no man can number? Rev. vii. 19.

* Zech. vi. 13.

saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard *it*, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders. And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was *it* from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all *men* counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

On entering the city, our Lord's first object was to visit the temple, and having witnessed the sad abuse of that sacred place which prevailed, he took occasion on his next visit, to exercise that authority which he had over his own house, and to remove the buyers and sellers, who, for the sake of the rent which they doubtless paid, were allowed by the priests to establish a market for cattle and birds, within the courts of the Lord's house, as if to be ready at hand for sacrifice. What a creature is man! how easily is his conscience over-persuaded, when his interest is concerned!

During this last visit of our Lord to Jerusalem, it was his habit to spend the day in the city, and to retire in the evening to the neighbouring town of Bethany, where he lodged with the pious family of Lazarus. On one occasion, as he went into Jerusalem, he sought fruit on a fig-tree which grew by the road-side, and finding none, he cursed it for its barrenness. A difficulty seems to exist here: why should our Lord expect fruit on this tree, when it is said—"the time of figs was not yet;" but these latter words do not assign the reason why our Lord found no figs on

this tree; it was rather the reason why he went to this one tree, which from its having leaves at that season, proved it to be of a particular species, whose old fruit remained till the new appeared. The time of ripe figs, on the *ordinary* fig-trees, was not come; but fruit might have been expected on *this* tree, because its leaves showed it to be of the other species.* Thus it was an apt emblem of the Jewish nation, which our Lord was just about to curse: their profession of true religion gave an expectation of fruit, though none could have been looked for among the Gentiles; but as this expectation was not answered, the nation was rejected, and has ever since continued unfruitful.

Alas! how many professing Christians are barren fig-trees; raising, and disappointing the expectation of those who seek fruit from them. The *leaves* of profession may impose upon man, but the Lord will speedily come to seek for *fruit*. Genuine religion makes men fruitful in good works, and religion without holiness of life, is but an empty name. What need have we to pray that God would "graft in our hearts the love of his name," and what encouragement does our Lord afford us in his reply to Peter—"what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them!"

Want of faith is a far more dangerous sin than many imagine. God has promised us great things in his holy word. To doubt the fulfilment of what he has promised, is unbelief—to expect the accomplishment of his word, and to act upon it, is faith, and without faith, no prayer, even for the smallest blessing, can succeed. Unbelief would make us imagine that God's promises are too good to be true; but is it not an insult to disbelieve him? "Hath he said, and shall he not do it—hath he spoken, and shall he not bring it to pass?" Away with unbelief, and let us reflect that, with faith, no prayer, even for the greatest blessings, can fail. Faith honours every perfection of the Deity, and in this view, can "remove mountains"—a phrase amongst the Jews for overcoming the greatest difficulties—we have mountains of sin and difficulties before us—but faith, looking to the power of Jesus, can cast them down and enable us to walk in the high way of holiness. God does not bind himself to any particular time or manner of answering the prayer of faith; he may see fit to defer his answer, but he will not delay it beyond the best time. He may also withhold the particular blessing that is asked, but he will give a better in its stead.

* "It was not yet the time of figs," being only the eleventh of Nisan, i. e. March or April. Dr. Shaw says that the boccôres, or early fig precedes the leaf, and often yields a few ripe figs before the rest.—See his Travels.

As our Lord now openly appeared in the character of the Messiah, the chief priests, and other leading persons of the nation, were exceedingly offended at his teaching and working miracles in the temple. They thought that nothing should be done without their authority, and questioned our Lord as to the power he assumed. His answer is a model of "the meekness of wisdom." He proposed a question respecting the power with which John the Baptist was invested, and as they could not but allow that he was "sent of God," he only claimed the same admission for himself, as sufficient to justify his conduct. But as the true answer to this question would involve them in difficulty, they declined an answer altogether. What a strange world is this! men are allowed to commit all manner of sin and iniquity, and no one chides them, or says—"By what authority doest thou these things?" but as soon as a person becomes alive to religion, and is active in the cause of the Lord, he is spoken of as an enthusiast, and attempts are made to restrain him. But if he acts upon the authority of the word of God, he may be confident that his opposers shall be silenced in the end.

CHAP. XII. 1—17.

CHRIST FORETELLETH THE REJECTION OF THE JEWS AND CALLING OF THE GENTILES—ON PAYING TRIBUTE TO CÆSAR.

And he began to speak unto them by parables. A *certain* man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about *it*, and digged *a place for* the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught *him*, and beat him, and sent *him* away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our's. And they took him, and killed *him*, and cast *him* out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way. And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in *his* words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master,

we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see *it*. And they brought *it*. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Cæsar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

THERE are many passages of Scripture wherein God speaks of himself as frustrated and disappointed by the conduct of his creatures. We are not, however, to suppose that any event happens contrary to his expectation, but the truth is, God speaks after the manner of men, for the sake of accommodating himself to our low and feeble apprehensions. Bearing these remarks in mind, we shall better understand the parable which our Lord spoke to the Jewish priests and rulers, to expose their sin and danger in rejecting him—the Son of God. The Lord had conferred on the Jews the exclusive privileges of the visible church, compared in the parable to the vineyard, which his bounty had furnished with fruitful plants, and which he committed to them to dress and cultivate. From time to time he sent messengers to them to obtain some return for the blessings he had conferred in making them the depositaries of his truth; but some of them they had beaten, and others they had killed; having therefore one Son, his well-beloved, he determined to send him, "saying, they will reverence my Son." But in the conclusion of the parable our Lord represents them as treating him worse than any, and, so to speak, disappointing the expectations of his Father, who sent him.* If God expected the Jews to reverence his Son, even when accompanied with all the outward marks of humility, how much more reverence will be expected from us, who *acknowledge* him to be the Son of God! How strong are the reasons why we should reverence the Lord Jesus! If God had sent an angel, or only a man like ourselves, we ought to reverence him, because the authority of the King is to be acknowledged in his ambassador. But when he sends his co-equal, co-eternal Son, who is Jehovah's fellow, ought we not to testify all possible respect for him? But how should our reverence be heightened, when we consider our extreme need of such a Saviour! Surely God may well expect that we should be solicitous to escape the wrath to come, when he has exhibited

* Luke xiii. 34.

his anger against sin in the sorrows and agonies of his well-beloved Son—our surety and substitute. But if we, like the Jews, reject this great stone of the corner, we must fall under the wrath of a holy God, who will take special vengeance on those who despise the love and grace of such a Saviour.

The parable of the vineyard ought to be particularly interesting to us Gentiles, whilst it conveys the most solemn threats of judgments to the Jews. The Lord sums up the whole of the parable, by asking the question, "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?" The reply is, (which St. Matthew says, the Jews themselves gave *) "He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto *others*." Now the Lord's declarations have been fulfilled in the casting out of Israel for an appointed time, and the vineyard or visible church has been committed to the Gentiles. What a mercy is it to have the means of grace,—the ordinances of our gracious God; surely if we are slothful or unfruitful, we must expect that all these precious benefits will be utterly taken from us.

After the many defeats which the leaders of the Jewish sects had experienced from our Lord, it is strange that they should again enter upon an argument with him. But the mere possibility of success, leads many to some desperate effort. So it proved here, for three different parties, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, undertake to argue with him, in hopes of catching him in his words—a fruitless effort as it proved. The two former proposed a question respecting the divine right of paying tribute to an earthly monarch: they asked whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, the Roman emperor, or not. The dilemma in which they wished to place our Lord, was this, if he said no—the Herodians (who were a mere political sect,) might represent him as an enemy to Cæsar. If he answered that it *was* lawful—the Pharisees might represent him to the people as no friend to their nation; because, by recommending the payment of tribute, he would seem to perpetuate their subjection to the Romans. But our Lord having obliged them to confess that the coin which they allowed to pass current, bore the image and superscription of Cæsar, this implied that Cæsar was their supreme governor, and as such was entitled to tribute, for the necessary expenses of the government. At the same time he reminded them, that the first tribute of their affections was due to God, their moral governor. His answer, therefore, ought to

* Matt. xxi. 41.

be our rule; let us give to God the first and best offering, and we shall then know how to love and obey the creature in the right position. Cæsar's coin is gold and silver, but God's coin is man, in whom his image is engraven. Render to Cæsar your riches, but to God a pure conscience.*

CHAP. XII. 18—44.

THE SADDUCEE'S CAVIL ABOUT THE RESURRECTION SILENCED—THE WIDOW'S MITE COMMENDED.

Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave *his* wife *behind him*, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err. And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love *his* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*. And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he *then* his son? And the common people heard him gladly. And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware

* Hilary on Matthew.

of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and *love* salutations in the market-places, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called *unto him* his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all *they* did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, *even* all her living.

THE question proposed by the Sadducees was suited to their peculiar views. They were a sect of the Jews, and derived their name either from the word Sedek, which means *justice*, because they justified themselves before God and men, or from Sadoc, the founder of their sect. They were full of infidel notions, denying a large portion of the Bible, the existence of spirits, and the prospect of the resurrection; * hence their question regarded a future resurrection, and they adduced a case, either real, or fictitious, of a woman who had seven husbands, and then required our Lord to state which of the seven should claim her in the time of the resurrection. The answer was simple—our Lord replied that marriage was intended only for this world—that in the future state, as there should be no death, neither should there be any marriage—that the enjoyment of the future state should be purely spiritual, and that their error on this point arose from their ignorance of the Scriptures. This is the cause of that lamentable ignorance about divine things, which is found even in our day of light and privileges; if persons would read the word of God, with prayer for divine instruction, we should hear less of those unscriptural ideas and doctrines, which so many frame for themselves, or take upon the authority of their neighbours.

Having answered the question which the Sadducees proposed, our Lord took occasion to prove the doctrine which they rejected, out of that portion of the Scriptures which they received, viz. the five books of Moses. When God appeared to Moses, he spoke of himself as "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." † Now this was spoken two hundred years after the youngest of them was dead, and yet God spoke of his relation to them as still existing. "I *am* the God," &c. But "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" the very title,

* Acts xxiii. 8. † Exod. iii. 6.

therefore, which God assumed, implied that these persons were yet in existence. Nor did it less forcibly imply that their bodies also should be restored to life: for they, as men, consisted both of body and soul; and God was as much the God of their bodies, as of their souls; if their bodies should never rise again, that relation had ceased with respect to their bodies, and so they must seem to allow that God was wrong in what he had said to Moses: thus, in their anxiety to entrap our Lord, they involved themselves in a blasphemous conclusion.

After the fruitless efforts of the Pharisees and Sadducees, it was a bold adventure of a certain Scribe to engage with our Lord on the field of disputation. Though less captious than those who preceded, he was under the influence of an improper spirit; but our Lord's answer to his question, regarding the chief commandment (a point much in dispute among the Jewish doctors,) was so satisfactory, that he was led to agree with him, more than, perhaps, he at first intended. The love of God was stated to be the first commandment, and next to it, the love of our neighbour; and the subsequent remarks of this Scribe upon the superior excellence of these moral precepts above any ceremonial observance, induced our Lord to say, "Thou art not *far* from the kingdom of God." A happy state, where it belongs to the humble enquirer who is seeking acquaintance with God; but a very delusive state, where men are satisfied with going to a certain extent in religion, but fear giving themselves heartily to God. If the love of God be the first and great commandment, and if that love requires undivided allegiance, how shall we bear to be examined on this point? Can we say that God has the *whole* of our hearts? Is the utmost vigour of our faculties exerted in his service? Do we make him the end of all our actions, of all our wishes, of all our pursuits?

Our Lord's observation upon the widow's gift teaches us to estimate charity, not so much by its actual amount, as by the proportion which it bears to our means. She gave "two mites," which was all she possessed,* consequently she left herself without any thing, and if our Lord had not commended her act, there are numbers who would have blamed it as unnecessary and presumptuous. If our motives be pure, we need not fear an excess on this point. Let us recollect that the Lord Jesus still has his eye on the treasury, to observe in what degree, and from

* *ὅλον τὸν βίον*—"all her life"—a strong expression—life is put for food; and when she could give up her *food* and expose herself to want, her charity must have been of the highest quality!

what motive, we are ready to contribute; and we cannot but long for the time when all shall feel themselves but stewards of the trust reposed in them, and when we shall cease to complain that the Lord's work is retarded by the abuse of his own property, in gratifying the taste, indulging the vanity, and ornamenting the persons of those to whom he has lent it for a far different purpose.

CHAP. XIII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM TYPICAL OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!* And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately. Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any *man* deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ;* and shall deceive many. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for *such things* must needs be; but the end *shall* not *be* yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these *are* the beginnings of sorrows. But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead *you,* and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against *their* parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains: And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter *therein,* to take any thing out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For *in* those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days. And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here *is* Christ; or, lo, *he is* there; believe *him* not: For false Christs and false prophets shall

rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if *it were* possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now learn a parable of the fig-tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves; ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, *even* at the doors. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. *For the Son of man is* as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

On different occasions, but especially at the close of his life, our Lord taught his disciples to look forward to a future period, when he should assuredly come again. He specified two objects for which he should come; the one was, to destroy Jerusalem, and the other—to judge the world: and inasmuch as the former of these advents was typical of the other, he blended the narrative of both together. The language of the latter part of this chapter carries us forward to the events of the "day of the Lord"—when he shall come to his people's joy, but for the destruction of his enemies.*

With respect to the first of these events, he foretells the awful calamities which were soon to overtake the city of Jerusalem, as a just judgment upon the Jews for their rejection of him—the Messiah. Our Lord was now ready to depart from the temple, never more to enter it. His disciples called his attention to the stateliness and grandeur of the building, little considering how sin would undermine its foundations, and lay its honours in the dust. Sin brings cities and kingdoms, as well as particular persons, to destruction. Our Lord then states, what must have excited their astonishment, that, grand and magnificent as that temple was, not a stone should be left upon another, before the end of that present generation. And although from its prodigious strength this seemed almost impossible, yet were our

* See verse 32, to the end.

Lord's words exactly accomplished. Titus, the Roman Emperor, laid siege to the city, which, after a long and desperate resistance, yielded; but not before the inhabitants were distracted by internal discord, and thousands had perished in the agonies of actual starvation. The privations which the Roman soldiers suffered during the siege, so exasperated them, that the commands of their general could not restrain their fury when once they had gained an entrance to the city; and notwithstanding his positive injunctions to the contrary, this magnificent temple fell a prey to their rage, and was burned to the ground; and as if to shew how minutely every word of Christ must be fulfilled, the plough was made to pass over the foundations on which this noble pile once stood.

What a fearful thing must it be to reject the Lord Jesus, if, for this crime, the Jews were visited with such fearful calamities! Oh it should make us tremble for ourselves, lest while we confessedly receive him, we may virtually reject him, and in works deny him. We may perhaps think that what we read in this chapter, is merely a narrative of events long since past, and in which we are no ways interested. But be assured this is not the case. The destruction of Jerusalem was evidently intended to be a type or representation of that still more awful event which is yet to take place, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know him not." * And in the prospect of this, we have much need to observe the admonition, contained in the latter verses of the chapter.

Our Lord in illustrating the momentous prospect of his second coming to judge the world, compares himself to a master, leaving his house, and appointing his servants their work, and commanding his porter to watch, in order to admit him without delay, at whatever moment he should arrive. He represents the precise time of his return as unknown to men, or angels, or even to himself, (so far at least, that the Holy Spirit, by which he was anointed to his prophetic office, had not communicated it to him as any part of the Revelation which he was to make known to men,) and from thence inculcates the necessity of incessant watchfulness. But though we cannot be certain either of the day or hour of the Saviour's second advent, yet are we commanded to *watch* for it as an event that may come to any age of the Church. Certain signs are given to quicken attention,

* 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

and when they take place, the Church will then *know* that the "summer is near"—the glory of the blessed kingdom; but even before these signs are fully manifest, all believers should individually wait for the coming of the great King—because he has enjoined it on us, and because it may arrive in our day and generation. Many Christians expect the gradual conversion of the world, and the fulfilment of a long chain of prophecies to take place before the advent of Christ, and hence they are looking for other things, instead of the Saviour's arrival to his household. This is a sad mistake; it not only removes this glorious day to the distant horizon, but it prevents its having the practical tendency that Jesus inculcated on us all. *Watchfulness* is our duty and privilege, because the Lord may return whilst we are alive and actively engaged in the affairs of this life. Let us listen to his charge—thrice, in the space of a few verses, does our Lord repeat the same injunction—"watch." May we have grace to put us in a state of watchfulness—may the careless be timely warned—may the half-awakened be aroused to increased exertion—and may the sincere Christian have his loins continually girt, and his lamp trimmed, and he himself like unto one who waits for the coming of his Lord.

NOTE v. 32.—Christ as God did not reveal to his manhood, whilst on earth, the precise time of his second coming. Though there is no doubt that now being glorified in heaven, he doth know it even as he is man.—See Petter on this verse.

CHAP. XIV. 1—31.

JESUS AT BETHANY—ANOINTED BY MARY—JUDAS SELLETH HIS MASTER FOR MONEY—THE LORD'S SUPPER INSTITUTED—CHRIST FORETELLS PETER'S DENIAL.

After two days was *the feast of* the passover, and of unleavened bread; and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put *him* to death. But they said, Not on the feast *day*, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured *it* on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you,

Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, *this* also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them. And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him. And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished *and* prepared: there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me, And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, *Is* it I? and another *said*, *Is* it I? And he answered and said unto them, *It is* one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born. And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them; and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet *will* not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, *even* in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in anywise. Likewise also said they all.

By our Lord's departure from the temple, as recorded in the preceding chapter, he seems to have closed his public ministry. The rest of his instructions were given in private to his own disciples, whom he now reminds that the feast of the Passover would be held within two days, and that at that time he should be betrayed into the hands of his enemies, and close his earthly mission.

Our Lord was at this time entertained at Bethany, by "Simon the leper," who had probably been cleansed by him. If we compare this account with the same as recorded in the 12th chapter of St. John, we shall find that Lazarus was a guest at this supper—that Martha waited on them, and that Mary, the

sister of Lazarus was the woman who anointed our Lord with the ointment: the late extraordinary favour conferred on her, in the resurrection of her beloved brother, having excited those fervent and grateful affections which influenced her conduct. She had a box of very precious ointment, which she thought could not be better disposed of, than in her Master's service; though the ointment was costly,* still, at best, the gift was small, when compared with the debt of gratitude she owed; yet it was all she had to give, and the Lord, who knew the motives from which it was done, accepted it, and vindicated her conduct against the censures of Judas, whose covetous disposition now betrayed itself. One part of this circumstance is remarkable. We do not apprehend that Mary herself had any idea of confirming our Lord's assertions, respecting his approaching death; but by this act she unconsciously predicted the death of her beloved Lord. It was common among the Jews to embalm the bodies of their departed friends with odour, and sweet spices; but there would be no time allowed for such tokens of respect from the friends of Jesus; therefore our Lord construed this action of Mary's as a previous preparation for his funeral, and as a performance of a rite which could not otherwise have been effected.—"*She hath done what she could.*" Can each of us say, 'I have done what I could for Jesus?' We have not him, personally, amongst us, but we have his poor to relieve—his gospel to publish—and his word to circulate—so that if there be in us a feeling of love and gratitude, we shall find opportunities enough of testifying it.

Satan always suits his temptation to the character of the person he has to deal with. Covetousness, we have already seen, was the besetting sin of Judas, and with the allurement which the chief priests held out, he is tempted to become a traitor. They set upon the head of Jesus the price of a slave, and they find an apostle base enough to accept it. The plan for the betraying of our Lord had been formed before the last supper, but it was on this occasion, when they were all assembled, that he showed how conscious he was of all that would happen, while it gave proof that the offering of himself was perfectly voluntary.

We cannot pass over the miraculous detail of future circumstances which our Lord laid before his disciples, when sending them to prepare a place for the Passover. Nothing could be less

* Hence μυρισια is used—to anoint with aromatic ointments, such as were used for the bodies of great men. The ointment was worth about nine pounds of our money. Mary spent more in anointing Christ than Judas demanded for the betrayal of his master.

the object of natural sagacity and foresight than the events he mentioned. Had the two disciples come to the place specified, rather sooner or later than they did, the "man bearing the pitcher of water" would either not have arrived, or would have been gone: but all was accurately accomplished as he had foretold. And now being assembled for the last time before his passion, our Lord instituted that solemn rite, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which was to take the place of the Jewish Passover; and as the latter was observed in prospect of the Messiah to come, so this Sacrament was instituted to keep up a continual remembrance of him who had come, whose body was broken, and whose blood was shed, of which the breaking of the bread, and the pouring out of the wine, were apt representations. All of us are invited, nay commanded, to celebrate this feast; but let it not be imagined that we are welcome guests without a saving faith in the Lamb of God. It is spiritual food which is there to be received, and unless we are spiritual, that is, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we shall receive no comfort at its celebration.* It is a melancholy reflection that there should be any one in the select company at which our Lord was present, to whom it was not a spiritual feast: especially one, who, having eaten of Christ's bread, should, in such a sense and degree as Judas, "lift up his heel against him." † May the Lord deliver us from a share in that guilt! we are treated as his friends; we are set at his table; let us not ungratefully kick against him.

How artfully must Judas have conducted himself, when, on such an intimation from our Lord of what was to happen, no particular suspicion appears to have fallen on him! But how vain is that artifice, be it ever so refined, which, while it preserves a character in the sight of men, cannot, in the least degree, impose upon Christ: the day will come when he will lay open the false and ungrateful hypocrite in a more overwhelming manner than that in which he here exposed Judas, and whatever advantage he may have gained, either by professing religion, or betraying it, he will undoubtedly find that "it had been good for him if he had never been born."

Our Lord seeing that the trying hour was close at hand, prepares his disciples for what they must expect. He tells them that the shepherd being smitten, the sheep should be scattered, and strongly intimates his doubts of their fidelity in the hour of

* Sacraments represent by similitude, signify by institution, but sanctify by virtue of Christ. Cited by Davenant.

† Psalm xli. 9.

trial. Peter, with his usual forwardness, answers at once, "though all shall be offended, yet will not I." Surely this is the language of many a Christian heart, when warned and animated by a sense of his dying love. But let none "be high-minded;" for Peter, after this declaration, denied his Master, and the same night in which the other disciples protested they would never leave him, they "all forsook him and fled." Nor, on the other hand, let the view of that frailty discourage us, though it ought to caution us; for the time came when each of them behaved as they had first promised; and they who in his very presence acted so weak a part, afterwards, through the influence of his strengthening Spirit, "resisted unto blood," and "loved not their lives unto the death," for the testimony of Jesus.

NOTE v. 22.—Gresswell remarks that the article is here omitted. "Jesus took bread" (ἄρτον not τὸν ἄρτον), perhaps because it was a loaf and therefore leavened, not in flat cakes as unleavened bread was always made.—Dissertations on Harmony, vol. iii. p. 107.

CHAP. XIV. 32—72.

JESUS IN GETHSEMANE—JUDAS BETRAYS HIM—THE FALL OF PETER.

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly *is* ready, but the flesh *is* weak. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest; it is enough, the hour is come: behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go: lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead *him* away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. And they laid their hands on him, and took him. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. And Jesus answered

and said unto them, Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and *with* staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled. And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about *his* naked *body;* and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death: and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what *is it which* these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy; and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands. And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, this is *one* of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art *one* of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth *thereto*. But he began to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

On the slightest attention to the story of our Saviour's sufferings, we cannot but be struck with astonishment. What a sight is here in the garden of Gethsemane! let our souls turn aside to behold it with a becoming temper; and, surely, we must wonder how the disciples could sleep, in the midst of a scene, which might almost have awakened rocks to compassion. Behold 'the Prince of life'—God's incarnate and only-begotten Son,—drinking of the bitter cup of suffering, which was necessary for the recovery of ruined man. Let us behold him kneeling, and afterwards prostrate on the ground, and there pouring out his "strong crying and tears unto Him who was able to save him from death." If Christ himself was so depressed with sorrow and

amazement,* and if the distress and anguish he endured, were such, that in his agony, the blood was pressed through the pores of his skin, and fell upon the ground; how shall the lost sinner be filled with horror, and with what dreadful agonies of anguish and despair shall he be overwhelmed, if he flies not to the merits of this bleeding Lamb, but lies under the burden of his own accumulated guilt!

The hour of sorrow which Jesus had so often mentioned, was almost come—a great multitude, with swords and staves, arrived, and the treacherous Judas, as their leader, gives the signal agreed upon. Wretched Judas! his crime was attended with dreadful aggravation; he had been a witness to the miracles which Christ wrought by his divine power, and therefore did not sin through ignorance. We have, in his case, an awful example of the danger of allowing any one secret sin; none can say how far it may lead him. On our Lord's being seized, the affectionate, but rash Peter, with more haste than prudence, struck the high priest's servant on the head; but Christ reproved the action, for to resist a lawful magistrate, even in an unlawful act, is discountenanced by the Gospel. On our Lord's quietly resigning himself into the hands of his enemies, all the disciples who just before had protested they would sooner die than forsake him, yet now, when put to the trial, deserted him and fled; † so little do the best men know their own hearts until great trials assail them. So easy is it for us all to *speak* of enduring persecution—and yet so difficult to bear up under it, when it actually comes—no creature-strength will do in such times—the grace of Christ can alone fortify and preserve us.

The grand council of the Jews met at the high priest's palace, waiting to have Jesus brought before them, and there they conducted him, bound like a criminal; Peter also followed at a distance, as if he were only a stranger, drawn there from mere curiosity. Observe the beginning of Peter's melancholy fall—he "followed afar off." Let Christians dread the first motions of sin; anything which would induce them to keep "afar off" from the Lord in prayer, or from the company of his people, must end in what will be fatal to their peace and spiritual prosperity. The

* ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι, v. 33, to be sore amazed. The Greek word signifies the astonishment that comes from fear: when a man seeth himself fall into some sudden distress, out of which he sees no coming out.—*Leigh.*

† Who the young man was, mentioned v. 51, is not stated. Theophylact thinks that he was one of that house where Christ eat the passover, and hearing of our Lord's danger, left his bed and ran to the garden, covered only with a linen cloth. It is not probable that he was one of the apostles.—See Mayer, Text 145.

council sought false witnesses against Jesus, well knowing they could procure no other: but their testimony did not agree, and on our Saviour's answering to the high priest's question in the affirmative, he said the evidence of guilt was sufficient, and so passed the sentence of death upon him. They then began to insult him in various ways, by which they unintentionally fulfilled several prophecies. One we may refer to. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting;" *—which prophecy was uttered about seven hundred years before our Saviour's sufferings.

Everything which Peter heard and saw in the palace of the high priest, was calculated to fill his mind with horror, and when, under the influence of terror and fright, he was charged with belonging to Jesus, he declared he knew him not; but mark how one crime leads to another. He first tells a lie, and being accused a second and third time, he adds oaths and curses to strengthen his falsehood; but, the cock crowing a second time, his whole guilt rushed into his mind; he immediately left the palace, full of the deepest shame and anguish, and wept bitterly at the remembrance of his cowardice and ingratitude. Peter was thus allowed to fall, to give him a better knowledge of his own heart—to lessen his confidence, and to make him more humble and modest: and, his whole conduct afterwards showed, that he profited by the *painful* lesson.

The inspired writers commend themselves to us, by their faithfulness in recording their own faults. If St. Mark wrote his Gospel, under the direction of Peter, as many suppose, we are constrained to admire the humility of Peter, more especially since his fall is related more strongly, and his repentance touched on more lightly, by this, than by any other of the sacred historians. But while his conduct shows us the folly of promising anything in our own strength, it also forcibly shows us the danger of yielding to the fear of man. Peter was naturally of a bold, intrepid spirit; but the dread of scorn and suffering caused his courage to fail, and, except Judas the traitor, none of his brethren fell so low as he. He purchased a temporary peace, at the expense of his honour—his conscience—and his soul. It is justly said, that "the fear of man bringeth a snare." Perhaps it is one of the greatest snares that lie in our way to the kingdom of heaven. The profession

* Isaiah l. 6.

of Christianity does not now expose us to sufferings, as it did in the apostles' days; but a real love to the Gospel, and conformity to the Saviour's image, is as offensive now to the world, as it ever was; nor can any one become a sincere and zealous follower of Christ, without incurring much hatred, contempt, and obloquy. Let those who are in any danger of yielding to this snare, and who would wish to be spared the bitter tears that its indulgence must cause, keep our Lord's words continually in mind, "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

CHAP. XV. 1—20.

JESUS BROUGHT BEFORE PILATE—HIS STRUGGLES OF CONSCIENCE—YIELDS TO THE PEOPLE'S WISH—RELEASES BARABBAS THE MURDERER, AND DELIVERS JESUS TO BE MOCKED AND CRUCIFIED.

And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried *him* away, and delivered *him* to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest *it*. And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled. Now at *that* feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was *one* named Barabbas, *which lay* bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire *him to do* as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do *unto him* whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him. And *so* Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged *him*, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Prætorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his *head*. And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing *their* knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

WHAT we read in the foregoing chapter of our Saviour's sufferings, was but an introduction to them—here we have their

completion. We left him condemned by the Jewish priests and rulers; but their power in cases of life and death being much limited, because of their subjection to the Romans, they sent him bound to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, charged with the crime of treason, as though he were anxious to be made king, in opposition to Cæsar. How wonderfully does God accomplish his purposes and predictions! An extraordinary instance of this here occurs. Had the Jews been able to inflict the punishment of death, they would have *stoned* Jesus, as being in their view guilty of blasphemy. But the word of God had foretold that his hands and his feet should be pierced, and that his body should be so extended, that his bones could be clearly distinguished through his skin.* And this accordingly did happen; for being given up to the Roman power, he suffered crucifixion, which was a Roman punishment. Sooner shall the sun move from its place in the centre of the universe, or the earth move out of its sphere, than a tittle of God's word fail of its accomplishment.

A struggle now takes place in the breast of Pilate, between conscience and the love of popularity. His conscience tells him that Jesus was a holy man, and the evidence which was adduced, favours his acquittal; he was moreover convinced that Jesus was delivered through envy, and not for real guilt; yet, after all he suffers him to be condemned. How lamentably does worldly interest triumph over conscience, in this case, when, after all the convictions of his mind, he gives up Jesus to the popular fury; and how wisely was it ordered by Divine Providence, that the testimony of the Saviour's innocency should be given by his judge, who, at the same time, was base enough to pass an unjust sentence. Are any of you inclined to censure the conduct of Pilate? It was dreadful no doubt—but look closely into your own hearts, and see if you are not guilty of the same. Did it never happen that a point of duty was so clearly put before you, that conscience, reason, and the word of God approved your observing it—and yet, has not the fear of man's opinion, or the love of his praise, influenced you to choose the evil, and forsake the good? and what is this but acting the part of Pilate?

The conduct of the people on this occasion, was marked by the most perverse blindness. For though they had gone so far as to bring Jesus like a prisoner to the bar of Pilate, yet they might even there have corrected their evil intentions. It was

* Psalm xxii. 16, 17.

customary for the Roman governor to release one prisoner at the passover, and Pilate, still anxious to follow the dictates of his conscience, asked them—"Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" but they refused the offer. "They denied the holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them." * What madness was this! what blind infatuation! but think again. Are you never guilty of the same? when you put away the invitations of Christ's Gospel, that you may retain your beloved sins, do you not prefer Barabbas to Jesus? when you forsake or avoid the company of religious persons, that you may join in the society of the worldly, the profligate, or profane, do you not prefer Barabbas to Jesus? when you choose any of the ways of Satan in preference to the commands of Christ, is not your conduct the same? While you blame, then, the rulers and the people of the Jews, consider whether you are not condemning yourself. Their doom was awful; and in it see a picture of what your's shall be, if you allow either worldly advantage or worldly friendship, to influence your mind in neglecting what your conscience approves, or doing what it disapproves.

Pilate's conduct appears worse the more we look into it. Barabbas was not only a notoriously bad character, as a robber, but he was guilty of the very crime of which the scribes and priests falsely accused Jesus, viz,—having joined in, or headed an insurrection against the Romans; and he had committed murder in the attempt. Yet this is the man which he allows to be released in preference to Jesus. And now being condemned, by the decree of Pilate, we see the suffering Jesus exposed, not only to the insults of the Jewish rabble, but of the Roman soldiers. He had been accused of making himself a king, and upon these grounds, they make sport of him. A robe—a crown—a sceptre, were all ensigns of royalty, and with these they deck him—but in mockery. Oh, what a sight was this! to see the Son of the Eternal, made a subject of cruel sport, by his rebellious creatures! How truly might he exclaim, "I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people." † How frequently should we "consider him who endured such *contradiction* of sinners against himself." ‡ But, is not the same scene daily repeated, when such numbers offer to the Saviour the homage of their lips, while in works they deny him? Let it be remembered that those who pretend sub-

* Acts iii. 14, 15. † Psalm xxii. 6. ‡ Heb. xii. 3.

jection to Christ, and yet give themselves up to the service of the world and the flesh, do, in effect, the same as they who bowed the knee to him in mockery, and insulted him, saying—"Hail, king of the Jews," while they also said—"We have no king but Cæsar." Those who bow the knee, but do not bow the soul, put the same affront upon Jesus that the Roman soldiers did.

CHAP. XV. 21—47.

JESUS IS LED TO GOLGOTHA—HIS CRUCIFIXION—THE TRUE CAUSE OF HIS SUFFERINGS—THE MIRACULOUS DARKNESS—THE BODY OF JESUS BURIED BY JOSEPH.

And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a scull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received *it* not. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days: Save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking, said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others: himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard *it*, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put *it* on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem. And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling *unto him* the centu-

rion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew *it* of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Joses beheld where he was laid.

We have here an account of the closing scene of our blessed Lord's life. He goes out from that once favoured, but now accursed city of Jerusalem, and is led to Golgotha, "as a lamb to the slaughter." It was customary for the persons who were sentenced to crucifixion, to carry their cross to the place where they were crucified, and in the narrative of another of the evangelists, it seems that the cross was at first laid upon the Lord Jesus.* But having been so harassed by multiplied fatigues and miseries, he probably appeared almost exhausted, so that the people might fear, lest he should die of fatigue, and escape their further cruelties, if they compelled him to proceed with it. Therefore, meeting with a man named Simon of Cyrene, who evidently was suspected of favouring him, they obliged him to carry the cross—an apt representation of the believer's conformity to his Lord, in bearing the scorn and hatred of the world. It was also customary to give those who were about to suffer this painful and lingering death, a draught of wine and spices, to benumb their feelings: and some compassionate persons seem to have offered this cordial to Jesus, but he would not taste it, as his purpose was, to suffer death in all its bitterness. This draught was probably different from the vinegar mingled with gall, mentioned by St. Matthew †—which they gave him in mockery, and which he would not receive—to show that it was unlike the usual benumbing cordial given to others—which, when offered to him by his friends, he also refused, because he would not sweeten the bitter cup appointed to him by the Father.

And now the hour was come, when the glorious work of redemption should be completed, and the Saviour, who had all in heaven and earth at command, and who by a single mandate, could have swept his murderers into eternity, patiently submits while his hands and feet are pierced—his body extended on the tree—and while his sufferings are made the subject of their savage joy. Surely it must occur to us to enquire—for what did Christ suffer all these things?—not, certainly, for his own

* John xix. 17. † See Matt. xxvii. 33, 34.

sins, for he had none, and even in the estimation of his judge, was innocent of the crime laid to his charge. The only answer which can be given, is that supplied by the word of God—that he, the just and holy one, died for unjust men, that by his atonement their sins might be expiated.* Happy they to whose account these all-prevailing merits are put down. His merits, indeed, are now laid up in the treasury of God's mercy, sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world, but are applied to those alone whose hearts have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, to feel their sinfulness, and who, from a sense of utter want and helplessness, have made earnest application for pardon through his blood.

We are told that Jesus was nailed to the cross, and that he hung suspended for several hours—the scorn of men, the wonder of angels: nor did so trifling a circumstance as the *hour* of his death occur, without reference to previous arrangement; for it is worthy of remark, that it was the very hour at which the Israelites were commanded by God to kill the lamb for the passover; and by expiring at the same time, our Lord showed that he was the true paschal lamb, whose blood, if sprinkled upon our hearts, will preserve us from the power of the destroying angel.

Previous to his death, a miraculous darkness covered the land. It does not appear to have been universally felt, but while the sun was enlightening the rest of the earth, this one corner of the world, in which so horrible a crime was perpetrating, was covered with the thickest darkness.† This miracle may seem to have been opposed, by one directly opposite, viz. that when darkness covered the whole of Egypt, the sun shone upon the Israelites alone. *Then*, God intimated the destruction of the Egyptians, and the liberty of his people—*now*, on the contrary, he showed, that while miserable blindness was coming upon the Jews, (with which they are punished to the present time,) the heavenly light of the Gospel would arise on other nations.

It would appear that our Lord hung in silent agony during the three hours of darkness; at last, about the ninth hour, his grief burst forth, and with a loud cry, he gave vent to his sorrows, exclaiming "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." A deep and wonderful exclamation, uniting in one view the horrors of darkness that covered his soul, and yet the reliance

* See 1 Pet. ii. 24.

† Whitby seems to think that this darkness was noticed by heathen writers as occurring in different parts of the world, and cites some remarkable testimonies from Origen, Tertullian, and Eusebius.—See his Annotations on v. 33.

of faith in his Father's power. Still, "my God," though forsaken, but *how* forsaken, you may ask; 'he means that he was under a suspension of that joyful communion with the Most High, which he had enjoyed to that moment. God's sensible consolations were withdrawn from Christ's human nature. He therefore speaks according to that nature, because he felt according to it, he felt as a man.* And *why* forsaken? Why, but that his people might not suffer the blackness of darkness for ever. Our sins caused this awful darkness in the Redeemer's soul, his sufferings will save us from the hiding of God's countenance for ever, if we trust in him. Should we be tried by a feeling of desertion at any time, let us not be overcome, but still cry to our Father, "My God, my God," and he will deliver us in his own time. The Lord grant that the narrative of these events, which display the Saviour's love, may work in us a saving knowledge of the truth; so that by the teaching of the Spirit, we may, each, from our own experience, be enabled to say—"Truly this was the Son of God," who loved me, and gave himself for me. We have now seen the sufferings of our expiring Lord: let us view him by faith till the heart is affected, and till we learn to glory in nothing but his cross, whereby the world may be crucified unto us, and we unto the world.†

The boldness of Joseph deserves our notice. He was not ashamed to acknowledge Christ, but came with holy reverence and affection to take down his sacred remains, which he safely deposited in his own *new* tomb; thus fulfilling the prophecy of Scripture, which stated, that though he had his death with the wicked, he should have his grave with the rich.‡

We leave, for the present, his enemies in triumph, and his friends in tears, till his resurrection, which soon confounded the rage of the former, and revived the hopes of the latter—hopes, which must otherwise have been buried under that stone with which they now covered him. But happy and comfortable is the thought, that the Saviour has perfumed the grave by his transient visit, and, so, has reconciled the believer to dwelling a while in that place where his Lord once lay.

NOTE on v. 22.—Γολγοθᾶ, (Golgotha) is a Chaldee word. The word for skull in Hebrew is similar, 2 Kings ix. 35. St. Mark here interprets it, "the place of a skull." 'On one occasion, about 32 years before this, Varus, the Governor of Syria, had crucified 2000 of the Jews at once, probably on this very spot.'—See note in Greswell. Disser. vol. iii. p. 159, and his reference to Jerome.

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* See Stevenson's Exposition of Psalm xxii.

† Gal. vi. 14. ‡ Isa. liii. 9.

CHAP. XVI.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST—ITS IMPORTANCE—CHRIST APPEARETH TO MARY MAGDALENE AND OTHERS—THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION—THE LORD JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first *day* of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any *man;* for they were afraid. Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. *And* she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that, he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told *it* unto the residue: neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils! they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them,* and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

THERE is no one circumstance connected with the history of our blessed Lord which is so essential to the Christian's comfort, as his resurrection, for, as St. Paul observes—"if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins."* But blessed be God, who has left us no such uncertainty concerning

* 1 Cor. xv. 17.

the efficacy of the Saviour's atonement, as the want of the resurrection would have produced. He *did* leave the tomb on the third day as he promised; he came forth a triumphant conqueror over death and Satan, and so revived the hopes, not only of his then disconsolate disciples, but of all his believing people to the end of time. Now is the justice of God amply satisfied, or he would never have released the prisoner. An angel descended—not to awaken Christ out of sleep, for he had within himself a power to resume that which he had voluntarily resigned; but he came to add a solemn pomp to his revival, and to strike the guards with such a terror as would effectually prevent any mad attempt on this glorious conqueror, when he was bursting the bonds in which he had for a while been held.

The women came early to the tomb, with sweet spices to embalm the body—an office which the lateness of the day on which he died prevented their performing: but we may recollect that this was, in a manner, done already by Mary, who poured upon his living head the box of precious ointment. Their intention and motives were excellent, but their effort was useless, for the body was not allowed to lie so long in the tomb as to need any art for its preservation. Their astonishment was great to find the stone removed, and the sepulchre empty, and greater still, perhaps, to be addressed by an angelic messenger, who sends them on an errand to announce to the disciples their Master's resurrection—"go tell his disciples, and Peter." Why name Peter specially? because his base conduct, in denying his Lord, might have made him think himself unworthy the name of a disciple, but to him also is the message sent, as a proof that he was not cast off by his long-suffering and gracious Master.

After this our blessed Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene—then to two of the disciples as they walked to Emmaus *—and afterwards to the eleven as they sat at meat. We have the testimony of all these persons to the truth of the Saviour's resurrection, nor did they acknowledge the fact, till they were persuaded by the evidence of their senses. In this respect, they are of assistance to us, for we have the more reason to believe those, who, themselves, believed so slowly. Had they received the account at once, they might have been thought credulous, and their testimony the less to be regarded; but their incredulity at first, shows that they did not believe it afterwards but upon a full conviction. And thus we have the best proof that they

* See Luke xxiv. 13.

were neither *deceivers* nor *deceived*—in a word, that their testimony was true.

We have, in this chapter, our Lord's farewell address to his disciples; and as love was so fully exhibited in entering the world, so love directed his every word and action up to the last moment of his stay. His concern was for the souls of men. And now that the Christian dispensation was to be introduced, and its blessings not to be confined to the Jewish people, the apostles are commissioned to "preach the Gospel to every creature." We, to this day, in this remote land, enjoy the benefit of it. The Lord has sent to us the gospel which the apostles preached, and he has given us duly ordained pastors, who, in this sense, succeed to the ministry of his first ambassadors. Let us remember the important consequences that will one day or other attend the Gospel's being brought to us. We have been favoured with a light which many nations have not yet seen. The Gospel has been preached to us, by the daily hearing of it in our family worship. It is preached when we read the word of God—it is preached when his faithful ministers speak agreeably to that holy word; and every time we hear or read, we lie under deeper obligations, and under deeper condemnation, if we make the Gospel of Christ a rock of offence, instead of building all our hopes upon that Saviour whom it reveals. If we believe the Gospel, we shall be saved—but, if we believe not, we shall be damned. The holiness of God is as much engaged to save the believer in Jesus, as it is to inflict woe upon the impenitent. We all have often heard the Gospel—are we under its influence, or are we not? if we are, do we give proof of it by the holiness of our lives? if we are not, do we indulge the vain hope that God will break his declaration by saving us in a way that contradicts his plan? May the Lord enable us to decide aright, while our ears are still open to hear its sacred sound.

St. Mark's gospel closes with an account of our Lord's ascension. This was done in the sight of his disciples. His being seen *after* his resurrection was proof sufficient that he had risen, without their seeing him rise: but not so with his ascension, for they could not see him in heaven while they continued on earth—therefore, he ascended before their eyes. May our hearts be lifted up with him, and raised above the things of time and sense, and may the thoughts of his second coming continually dwell upon our minds, that so when the trumpet's sound proclaims the approaching Saviour, we may with confidence lift up

our heads, and meet him, not as a condemning judge, but as our eternal portion and the triumphant King of kings.

NOTE 1, v. 7.—These women followed Christ out of Galilee, therefore the Angel foretels, that before they should return to Galilee, Christ should go before them and manifest himself unto them there, according to the promise in Matt. xxvi. 32. But wherefore doth the Angel foretel that Christ should specially go before them to Galilee, and that they should see him there, when he was neither seen there *only*, or for the *first time?* Because Christ and the Angel speak of that solemn and public apparition, in which Christ revealed himself to all the disciples together, in a mountain of Galilee.—See Leigh's Annotations.

NOTE 2, v. 19—We must consider what St. Mark subjoins, "and *sat* at the right hand of God." Whereas Stephen says "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man *standing*." Now *sitting* is the attitude of a judge, standing of one fighting or helping. Stephen, therefore, when toiling in the contest saw him standing, whom he had for his helper, but Mark describes him as sitting after his assumption, because after this glory, he will in the end be seen as judge."—Gregory's Homilies.

THE GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO

St. LUKE.

CHAP. I. 1—25.

ST. LUKE'S PREFACE—THE CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST—EXHORTATION TO PARENTS.

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and

my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

We are now entering on the record of the third Evangelist—St. Luke, who was the companion of St. Paul during all his travels, and to whom, under God's direction, we are also indebted for the valuable history of the early church, contained in "the Acts of the Apostles." * St. Paul calls him, "the beloved physician," † and, "the brother, whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches." ‡ This narrative of Christ's history he had been induced to undertake, because those which other well-meaning persons had attempted, were not compiled with sufficient accuracy. In this undertaking he was directed by the Spirit of God; by whose inspiration he was constantly guided through all the period of his labours; of this we have abundant proof, from the approbation of an inspired apostle, the ready reception of his Gospel by the early Church, and by the whole tenor of this portion of the Bible, which not only accords with the other Gospels, but contains some prophecies respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, which are more minutely related by him than by the other Evangelists.

He addressed this Gospel to *Theophilus*, a name which signifies a lover of God, and from the title which he gave him—"most excellent"—he appears to have been a person of rank and authority. Religion does not destroy civility and good manners, but teaches us, according to the usages of our country, to give "honour to whom honour is due." St. Luke would seem to have written this Gospel for the benefit of Theophilus; but God has graciously intended it and preserved it, for the use of his Church in all ages. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit's teaching, that by this repeated "declaration of those things

* See Acts i. 1, 2. † Col. iv. 14. ‡ 2 Cor. viii. 18.

which are most surely believed," and wherein we have already been instructed by St. Matthew and St. Mark, we may be so acquainted with the character of that Saviour whom they describe as to know, by experimental enjoyment, the certainty of those truths which are here related.

The two preceding Evangelists began their histories with the baptism of John; but St. Luke begins earlier, and tells of his conception and birth. His father was a Jewish priest, of the family of Aaron, whose name was Zacharias.* When in David's time the family of Aaron was multiplied, he divided them into twenty-four courses, for the more regular performance of their office: the eighth of those courses, was that of Abia,† and to it Zacharias belonged. His wife, too, was a descendant of Aaron, for the Jewish priests were careful to marry within their own family, that they might maintain the dignity of the priesthood. Of these two persons, it is said, that they were "both righteous," not merely in the sight of men, but "before God." They, as sinners, were justified and saved in the same way as others, but their religion was not put on as a mask of hypocrisy; it was the work of God upon their hearts, and their obedience was the fruit of gratitude. Yet, like many, or, we might say, like *all* the people of God, they had some trial to endure, and theirs was that of being childless. For the removal of this affliction they seemed to have often prayed; but God, for wise purposes, saw fit to delay their request for a long time. At length, they were visited in mercy, and while Zacharias was engaged within the tabernacle, offering up incense, the angel Gabriel,‡ who stood in the presence of God, appeared, and announced to him the grateful intelligence that Elisabeth should have a son. The character of this child, and the office which he was to sustain, were also distinctly related. As a token of his entire devotedness to God, it was promised that he should be a perpetual Nazarite; and though "conceived in sin" like others, that a saving change should be wrought in his heart by the Spirit of God, even at his birth, which should appear in his eminent wisdom and piety from his earliest youth; that in due time he should go forth a

* The time of his birth is further noted by its happening in the reign of Herod the Great. Calvin justly says, the departure of the sceptre from Judah was not so much evinced by Herod, being a foreigner (of Idumæan extraction,) as by his submission to the Roman sway, and by his despoiling Judah of all independance.

† See 1 Chron. xxiv. 10.

‡ Gabriel is a Hebrew name, signifying "the strength of God." Zacharias might be taught by his very name, that all things were easy to God. The same angel was sent to tell Daniel of the time, when the Messiah might be expected. Dan. ix. 21, 24, 25, and to inform Zacharias that the time had now expired.

zealous preacher and successful reformer; and that acting in the spirit of Elijah, he should prepare the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah, who should immediately follow him.*

We may well suppose that a pious parent, as Zacharias was, would have joy and gladness at the birth of such a child. Nothing could give him so much pleasure as to know that his child was to be "*great in the sight of the Lord.*" Can it be said, that the generality of parents experience the same pleasure which this holy man did, at hearing that his child should be great in the sight of the Lord? Judging by the education which parents in general give their children—the great anxiety they manifest for their external accomplishments, and the shameful neglect of their religious improvement—may it not be justly said, that it gives them more pleasure that their children should be great in the esteem of the world, than that they should be "great in the sight of the Lord?" Oh! what will such parents have to answer for, and how will the weight of guilt which their children accumulate, add to their own sufferings! What a pleasure should it be to parents to think that many may yet have reason to rejoice in the birth of their children, by their being the instruments of imparting to others the saving knowledge of the Gospel! And what a curse is it to those parents who bring up their children so regardless of religion that *they* not only perish, but by their example or unholy conversation, draw others into perdition with themselves. Think, ye parents, to whom God has given so important a charge, what an awful responsibility attaches to you! Present them to Christ first, in holy baptism, with the encouragement, which St. John's case gives, that they may be filled with the Spirit from their earliest day. Bring them to the font in faith and earnest prayer, and then the water of baptism shall not be a *naked* sign, but a seal of those covenant blessings which the Lord bestows on his faithful people. You should also pursue a consistent course with your children; bring them up as part of the flock of Christ. By precept, example, and discipline, train them up in the fear of the Lord. Oh! pray for your children, that they may be "filled with the Holy Ghost;" teach them, with their earliest powers, to lisp the name of Jesus; tell them of his matchless love—bring them up in his fear, and in the love of his holy word—and so be assured you shall have joy and gladness in the evening of your days. Be not faithless, as Zacharias was: he was struck dumb for doubting what the Lord's

* See Mal. iv. 5, 6.

messenger said; and unbelief is as great a sin now as it was then. Remind the Lord of his promise—ask him to do as he has said; and while so many thoughtless parents are ruining the souls of their children by neglect, and by a desire for their worldly advancement, let it be your care to follow up what was solemnly promised in their baptism, that they, "renouncing "the world, the flesh and the devil," should walk in God's commandments all the days of their lives.

NOTE on v. 1.—πεπληροφορημένων. Campbell contends that this word when applied to *things* (as here) should be rendered—*fulfilled*, and when, to persons, *convinced*—as in Rom. iv. 21. See his Translation of the Gospels, vol. ii. p. 484.

CHAP. I. 26—56.

GABRIEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO MARY—THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY IN CHRIST'S INCARNATION—MARY'S FAITH AND PRIVILEGES—HER VISIT TO ELISABETH, AND HER SONG OF PRAISE.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee; blessed *art* thou among women. And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill-country with haste, into a city of Juda; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me! For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed *is* she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul doth

magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden; for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy *is* his name. And his mercy *is* on them that fear him, from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

In six months after the conception of John the Baptist, the same angel Gabriel, who had been commissioned to announce his birth to Zacharias, is now sent to proclaim the Saviour's advent. Let us observe the wonderful accomplishment of prophecy, in all that related to the birth of Jesus.

So early as the third chapter of Genesis, where the first promise of the Saviour is given, it is said, that he should be "the seed of the woman" *—an expression which clearly shows, that though born of a woman, he should not be born of a man, for then must he have inherited the corrupt nature and the consequent curse which was entailed on all, who should descend from Adam in the ordinary course of nature. Again, it was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."† These things which seemed impossible with man, were yet possible with God; and now, when the time fixed in the councils of eternity had arrived, the Saviour's approaching birth is made known to a poor and obscure virgin, who was destined to be the future wife of as poor a person, named Joseph; but she was informed that though betrothed in marriage, yet that it was as a virgin that she was to be the honoured instrument of giving birth to the promised Messiah, who should be miraculously conceived in her womb.

The angel's message had a twofold communication. First, announcing the glory of that Saviour, to whom Mary was to give birth. So that by that ever-precious and significant name, Jesus, the glad tidings of salvation were published to her, and to all generations. Every sorrow the Saviour afterwards endured, every act of obedience to his Father, all bore on this gracious name, and breathed out salvation to a guilty world; whilst the promise that the "Lord God should give unto him the throne of his Father David," leads us on to the period of

* Gen. iii. 15. † Isa. vii. 14.

his triumphant kingdom, when Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; when Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all the nations of the world shall bow to the sceptre of king Messiah.* In reply to Mary's question, "How shall this be?" the angel declares the miraculous conception in these words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Here is no explanation given, but such an announcement as showed that in her offspring should be found united the divine and human nature. The faith of Mary on hearing this message was marvellously great—instead of cavilling or questioning further, she meekly submits and says, "Be it unto me according to thy word:" faith believes that nothing is impossible with God. Nor does she listen to the natural fears that might arise in her mind. She would be exposed to the injurious reflection of her neighbours, and even to danger from the Levitical law, for God had commanded that a virgin betrothed, should, if unfaithful to her engagements, be punished with death.† These fears she must have had, and that there were just grounds for them, appears by the very purpose which Joseph formed, of putting her away as an adulteress, and which was only prevented by the intervention of God himself, who revealed his purposes in a dream, and commended her to his peculiar care.‡ But she was persuaded of the Lord's power to screen and protect her; and therefore, at once yielded herself to his will, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

That Mary was "highly favoured," in being the vessel chosen for the reception and production of the man Christ Jesus, is a fact beyond doubt; but we positively deny that there is in this, or in any other chapter of the Bible, an expression, which warrants that adoration and worship which so many pay to her. This awful error and positive idolatry, seem to have taken rise in the inclination of fallen man to exalt the creature; and perhaps, in a corrupt state of the outward church, it was engrafted from heathen idolatry. She was first called "the Mother of God," afterwards applied to as a mediator, and then became an object of divine worship. As all this commenced in error, so it ends in a direct insult to a jealous God. Mary is not "the Mother of God," a most unscriptural and improper phrase, but

* See Jer. iii. 17, and xxiii. 5—8.

† See Deut. xxii. 23, 24. ‡ Matt. i. 18—20.

the mother of Christ's *human nature*—which, as consisting of soul and body, was like Mary's nature, even as she was like all other women. Let us also remember that though she was "blessed among women" in respect to this privilege, yet, in a higher sense, all believers are partakers of her glory,*—for when the people once exclaimed—"Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked," the Saviour immediately replied—"yea, *rather* blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." †

Immediately on receiving this intelligence from the angel, Mary set out from Nazareth upon a journey to visit her cousin Elisabeth at Jerusalem ‡; a distance of about sixty miles, over a very hilly country, and very difficult to traverse at that time. Her wisdom in taking this step was remarkable, for, by communicating the vision she had seen, she might convince Zacharias and Elizabeth that there was something singular in her case, and so might bring in the reputation of these worthy and eminent persons to support her own, which might otherwise be exposed to suspicion and censure. The conduct of Elizabeth, on Mary's arrival, is also worthy our attention. She neither was elated with the honour that had been conferred on her, nor was she envious of the superior honour bestowed on Mary; but, losing sight of her own mercies, she rejoices altogether in those which had been vouchsafed to her pious friend. Never shall we be enabled to observe that holy precept, "In honour preferring one another," and never shall that pride and selfishness which belong to our corrupt nature be removed, till we possess that Christian charity or love, spoken of by the Apostle, which "seeketh not her own, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up." §

And Mary too, in her reply, showed clearly on what her mind was fixed. Not a word of self-exaltation escaped her lips; but in her comprehensive and inspired hymn of praise, she rejoices in the prospect of pardon and deliverance for herself and others, through the merits of the coming Saviour. She says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my Spirit hath rejoiced in GOD MY SAVIOUR." In calling Christ her Saviour, she intimated that she was a sinner—for none else can apply to Jesus in this way. This proves that though we may call her the

* More blessed, says Augustine, in receiving the faith, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ. † Luke xi. 28.

‡ Some think that Mary went to visit Elizabeth at Hebron, a city of priests, about 25 miles from Jerusalem, and nearly one hundred from Nazareth.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

"blessed Virgin Mary," we must not use those unscriptural appellations, "the *immaculate* virgin," "the gate of heaven," &c. Could she now hear such addresses, she would turn from them with holy grief, and instead of receiving them, give again all the praise to the incarnate Son of God.

Let our faith, like that of Mary, rest on all the promises which the Lord has made. Let our souls "magnify the Lord," and our spirits rejoice in that Jesus, who, being "God," has become our "Saviour"—whose condescension hath regarded us in that "low estate," in which sin hath plunged us, and whose almighty power and love "hath done for us great things." He hath provided heavenly food to satisfy our hungry souls, and hath exalted us to see and enjoy the mercies which, in obscure intimations only, were promised to the pious patriarchs. "His mercy is on them that fear him." May we fear offending him by neglecting the Saviour, rather than fear the world's frown by becoming his true disciples.

NOTE.—It is no wonder that Mary's song of praise becomes our "magnificat" in the solemn service of the Church—every word was inspired—much was prophetic. In a concise commentary, like this, we can only call attention to this comprehensive burst of praise.

CHAP. I. 57—80.

ZACHARIAS'S PROPHETIC HYMN—A GENERAL APPLICATION OF IT.

Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not *so;* but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing-table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue *loosed*, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill-country of Judæa. And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his

holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

CONSIDERING the depth of humiliation to which the Son of God submitted in taking upon him our nature, it was necessary that his birth should be attended with such circumstances, as were calculated to impress the minds of men with a conviction of his real character. Accordingly we find, that, previous to his birth, there was ample testimony given to him as a most extraordinary personage, such as the world had never before seen. A person was sent "to prepare his way before him;" and this forerunner was distinguished by a preternatural birth. The father of this messenger was informed by an angel that his aged, and hitherto barren wife, should conceive a son, who should be called John.* On his expressing some doubt of the angel's veracity, he was struck dumb for his unbelief; and continued so, till after the birth of the promised child; and then, on his confirming the decision of his wife respecting the name of the child, which had been previously directed by the angel, his tongue was loosed, and his powers of speech restored. He then broke forth into a prophetic hymn of praise, in which he overlooks his own mercies in the birth of his child, and blesses God for the accomplishment of his promises in the advent of the Messiah. The language which he is made to adopt is calculated to show, that the deliverance of captive sinners from Satan's bondage by the coming of Christ, was prefigured, by the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people." When Abraham was warned of the afflictions of his posterity, he was also told that they should be rescued by a wonderful deliverance. Joseph, in his dying hour, assured his brethren that God would *visit* them, and bring them thence,†

* Ιωαννης. John signifies grace, because so full of grace himself, and the means of turning many to the Lord. The name was given at the time of circumcision, as ours at baptism. Though they often circumcised at home, yet not without the company of friends, how much more should baptism be with us a *public* ordinance?

† See Gen. l. 24.

and Moses was, in due time, sent to inform them, that God was come at last to *visit* and deliver them.

The prospect of the Saviour's coming, had excited a lively joy in the breast of Abraham, at the distance of two thousand years; and all who, in the intermediate space, had successively believed the promises, lived and died in the pleasing expectation, that the happiness denied to them, should be granted to their posterity. When the time for the Messiah's advent drew near, the expectation for him became more general, more joyful, and more assured. What wonder then that on the sight of his forerunner, Zacharias should burst forth in a song of praise? In the confidence of faith, he spoke of the Saviour as already come—yea, and the work of redemption as already effected, though there were yet several months to elapse before he should be born into the world.

What multiplied praises in heaven and earth did the Saviour's advent occasion! And shall not we unite in blessing "the Lord God of Israel, who hath visited and redeemed his people?" We are surely as much concerned in the raising up of this "horn of salvation," and in the redemption which he purchased by his blood, as the Jews of old were. The predictions of holy prophets being fulfilled in Christ, confirm the truth of the Scriptures to us: and the covenant and oath of God to Abraham were intended to give "strong consolation to those who flee for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them." The whole Scripture gives assurance of salvation to all believers, "by the remission of their sins;" and "through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high, hath visited" these distant nations, to give light to poor benighted Pagans, as our ancestors were, who then "sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death."

But all external privileges are of no avail, so long as our hearts are uninfluenced by the power of Christ's religion. What pleasure does the beauty of nature afford to a man born blind? What advantage does he gain by the cheering rays of the sun? They shine, but he is incapable of enjoying them. Just as incapable are we all, by nature, of receiving the light of the gospel. Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, pours forth beams of spiritual light and heat around us; but the God of this world hath blinded our minds, so that we cannot see its splendour, till that moral inability which prevails, is removed by the Spirit of God. Till then, "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not;" but when that spiritual operation

is performed, those who before "sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death," then see "a great light." "Through the tender mercy of God, the day-spring from on high visits them" —and their feet are guided into the ways of peace, such as they never before enjoyed. Let us pray, that God may work this mighty change upon each of our hearts, that he "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness would shine into our hearts, and give us the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ."

CHAP. II. 1—20.

AUGUSTUS TAXETH ALL THE ROMAN EMPIRE—JOSEPH AND MARY AT BETHLEHEM—CHRIST'S NATIVITY.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (*And* this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host; praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

THE accomplishment of prophecy is no more remarkable, than is the manner in which the Almighty effects it. Sometimes he

directs the hearts of men to act in accordance with his wishes; and at others, he leaves them to follow their own inclinations, and by their evil intentions, fulfills his purposes. The truth of this observation is borne out by the chapter before us. It had been predicted, many ages before, that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem.* Yet, within a very short time of his expected birth, we find that Mary was living at Nazareth—a city, above sixty miles distant from Bethlehem. To all human appearance, it seemed improbable that Mary should take such a journey, at such a time; and it must have seemed next to impossible, that she should be directed to go, without an express command from heaven. But God's word must be fulfilled, and let us observe the mode of its accomplishment. Augustus Cæsar, the Roman Emperor, being left to follow the dictates of his own ambition, issued an order, that an account should be taken of the number of all the subjects in his vast empire, which, in a vain-glorious style, was then commonly called—"the world." This enrolment or census was a registering of all his subjects—their age, office, and employment. It began about three years before the birth of Jesus, and had now reached Bethlehem. The actual *taxing* was not enforced until some years after this.† In consequence of this, all persons were required to resort to the city to which they belonged, and thus, it became incumbent on Joseph and Mary, being the lineal descendants of David, to go to Bethlehem, the city of the former, for this purpose. Thus was the prophecy fulfilled, that Christ should be born at Bethlehem; and thus, in pursuance of another prophecy, was it clearly established that he belonged to the family of David.

After the arrival of Joseph and Mary at Bethlehem, it is probable that some time elapsed before their turn came to be enrolled, and in this interval, the period of Mary's delivery arrived, and the long-expected Messiah was born. But what do we behold! The Redeemer of the world, destitute of an accommodation, upon his entrance into it! Had he been born of an imperial family, and placed under a canopy of gold and velvet, yet, would all this have been abasement in the eyes of those, who had beheld the glories of his celestial throne, and the honours paid him in the world above. But, behold the Son

* See Micah v. 2.

† See Prideaux's Connection of Sacred and Profane History, vol. ii. lib. 9.—Also, Greswell's Dissertation on the census of Cyrenius, Diss. xii. vol. i.—and also, Elsley's Annotations on the Gospels, vol. ii. p. 32.

‡ Psalm cxxxii. 11.

of God, and the heir of all things, not only an inhabitant of earth, but, we may say, choosing for himself a situation, which the poorest would have thought mean and despicable. His first habitation was a stable, and his cradle—a manger.* How does this humiliation of the Son of God exhibit the hollowness of all earthly pomp—for which, the sons of men pant and strive so earnestly. Christ's glory was in his condescension, and our true happiness is, like him, to sit loose to earthly things, and set all our affections on those things that never fade away.

Yet, mean as the birth of Jesus might appear, his heavenly Father did not leave him without witness. We see him, in this wonderful account that the evangelist hath given us, surrounded with a brighter lustre than a court or a crown could have afforded. Angelic legions are employed, as heralds, to proclaim the new-born king. Their noble anthem rang through the heavens —"Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace; good-will towards men." † They first ascribe all the praise to Jehovah, and then salute men with a message of peace; they are indeed well joined together, for the Lord's glory is peculiarly manifested in his good-will and free grace to a fallen and guilty world. Nor were they sent to the great and noble,—to Herod, or the chief priests,—but to humble, pious shepherds, who kept, by turns, the watches of the night, to ensure the safety of their flocks. Who would not have shared in their poverty and fatigue, to have heard with them these "good tidings of great joy?" Yet do we hear them daily—not from the lips of angels—but recorded as they fell from the lips of Him, of whom these angels testified. What impression do they make? Are they to us "tidings of great joy," or do we listen to them as we should do to any interesting tale of ancient history, without ever producing any effect upon our lives? Unless the gospel of Christ has caused us to renounce the world, and live to the glory of God—unless it has made known to our hearts that Saviour, who has made our peace with God, and can give us peace of mind; and unless good-will towards all our fellow-creatures reign within us, that gospel has been heard to no purpose.

* All the ancients hold that this *manger* was a place outside the city, hewed out of a rock, and called by the name of a manger. Thus Basil, 'The birth of Christ was a common feast of all creatures: angels come singing from heaven, the stars run about the heavens, the magi are brought from the Gentiles, and the earth receiveth him in a cave.'

† Some read it "peace to men of good will," but this does not agree with the whole tenor of the Gospel, which is a message to sinners; nor does it accord with the best manuscript readings. See Leigh.

But what would the shepherds have been profited by the tidings which the angels announced to them, respecting the Saviour's birth, if, like too many amongst us, they contented themselves with admiring the eloquence of the speaker, or the sweetness and melody of the hymn they sang? They set us a good example. They desired the edification of their souls. They proposed immediately to inquire into the things they had heard, and without having their faith shaken by the meanness of the Saviour's appearance, they honour him as their God, and then publish the glad tidings to all around. So shall we, if we have found Jesus to be our Saviour. We shall imitate the conduct of the famished lepers,* who, when they had found the Syrian camp deserted, and a vast plenty of provision and booty lying unprotected, "said one to another, we do not well, this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; now, therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's houshold." The reason why people are averse to speak on the subject of religion, is, because they do not feel its importance; but they to whom the Saviour has been revealed, "cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard."

NOTE on v. 4. Bishop Andrews says of Bethlehem, "Honour it—a star is over it—a Saviour is there—more good comes out of that poor town than all the glorious cities of the world. Emmanuel is born there—our ruler—our Redeemer—our guide."

CHAP. II 21—52.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST—HIS PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE—SIMEON AND ANNA PROPHESY OF HIM—HE QUESTIONETH IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE DOCTORS.

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord. Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus,

* See 2 Kings vii. 9.

to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it*. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

At the time appointed by the Mosaic law, our Lord Jesus underwent the rite of circumcision—in obedience to that ritual, of which he was the sum and substance! thus proving that he was of the nation of Israel and the end of the law, for righteousness to every one that believes. We also find Joseph and Mary going to the temple, to offer the usual sacrifices for her purification;* and, taking with her the infant Messiah, to present before the Lord her first-born son. It might be thought that as Mary did not bring forth a sinful child, as other women, these rites of purification were unnecessary,—but she submitted

* See Lev. xii. 8.

willingly to them, to shew her respect for the law, and that the infant Jesus was born under it for our sake. The poverty of Joseph and Mary may be gathered from the fact, that, they did not offer the usual sacrifice of the lamb, but the offering which the poor were allowed to make—"a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons." Mary's presentation of Christ in the temple speaks loudly to mothers,—how can they endure the thought of giving birth to a child, which shall prove the prey of Satan? Little do parents consider how much, under God, the salvation of their children depends on them. They are invited to dedicate their offspring to God at the solemn sacrament of baptism, which has taken the place of circumcision, and afterwards to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, with the assurance of a divine blessing on their efforts. Let them continue in prayer, and in due time they shall reap if they faint not.

A remarkable circumstance occurred, at the time of our Lord's presentation in the temple. Among those who were living in expectation of the Saviour, and who viewed his advent "as a consolation to Israel," * was an aged believer, named Simeon. To him the Lord had promised, that he should not die before he had seen the Messiah; and now he was warned by an express revelation, to enter the temple at that moment when Mary was presenting Jesus before the Lord. On seeing Him, we are told, that he took the babe in his arms, and blessed God, saying:—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He saw *Him*, in whom all the prophecies met; and though he did not live to see their fuller accomplishment, as developed by the life and death of Jesus, yet did he, by faith, consider them as already accomplished, since *He* was born, who should complete them. And now, having seen his Saviour, he was ready to die in peace.

And what can give us solid comfort in a dying hour, but that which was the joy of Simeon? The great preparation for heaven, is to embrace Christ in the arms of faith. He is the Lamb of God, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and we, by faith, must apply to that blood for our individual safety, and claim that perfect obedience which alone can place us in a justified state before God. Without the knowledge of Christ in this way,

* Lightfoot has proved that it was usual among the Jews to swear by "the consolation of Israel"—meaning the Messiah. See his citation from the Talmud, vol. i. in loco.

no man can behold the face of God in peace. But do you ask, how is this faith to be attained? St. Paul answers, "Faith is the gift of God."* Ask, then, for this invaluable gift; ask it in prayer, and while you pray, remember that your salvation depends on your receiving it.

After Simeon had uttered this song, in praise of the infant Messiah, he blessed both Joseph and Mary, and then spoke prophetically of the effect which his Gospel would produce upon the hearts of men, saying, that he was "set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel," which means that some should be converted by that Gospel, while others would be rendered more callous by it.† Alas! what a painful reflection is it, that any should make shipwreck of their souls upon that rock, which was placed to be the foundation of their hopes; and yet we see this occur daily. We see persons who are so opposed to the preaching of the Gospel, that their anger is excited by it, and thus their sin and ruin are aggravated by the revelation of Jesus Christ: they extract poison for themselves out of the balm of Gilead; and enhance their condemnation, by refusing an entrance into their hearts to that Saviour who is the consolation of Israel. How has the preaching of the Gospel affected you? Have you been quickened by the Spirit's application of the word of truth, or have you been made more callous in the midst of appointed ordinances? Each sermon you hear, or each chapter of the Bible you read, must produce one or other of these effects. God grant that the word of truth may always touch you to the quick, and that as God's word cannot bend to meet your natural desires, your heart may be inclined to a conformity with it.

The Lord was pleased to confirm Simeon's testimony to Christ, by that of Anna, a prophetess; and after this, the Spirit of God has recorded nothing of the Saviour's early life, except that recorded in this chapter. At the age of twelve he conversed with the doctors in the temple, and delayed behind his parents, in this occupation, after they had left the temple. From this period until the age of thirty, he remained in obscurity at Nazareth. This concealment may appear mysterious to us, but all was arranged by infinite wisdom. It might have been in imitation of the Levitical priesthood—who did not enter on their office until thirty ‡—or rather, because there was an appointed season of subjection to his reputed parents. Jesus by becoming our surety, had engaged himself to fulfil all the relative duties

* See Eph ii. 8. † 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. ‡ See Numb. iv. 3, 23.

of the law—and this he accomplished at Nazareth by subjection to Mary and Joseph—as at other times he fulfilled all the prescribed duties of the law.

The example of Christ ought to be often placed before children. If he, the Lord of heaven and earth, thus condescended to subjection to his own creatures, what should they do who are bound by every obligation to honour their earthly parents?—absolute obedience is their plain duty, except where it conflicts with their higher duty to God, which is not often the case. Where rebellion and self-will reign, it is a proof that children have not been well disciplined in the ways of God, after the example of Christ. Even in the temple, Christ has given all of us, and especially the young, an example of *docility*. He was not *disputing*, as is often supposed, but "hearing the doctors and asking them questions"—he was himself in the position of the learner, and thus instructed us that we should be willing to learn—"swift to hear, slow to speak." Nor should we pass over the answer of Jesus to his parents, on their finding him in the temple: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This will furnish us with evidence on an important point, namely, whether we are the children of God or not. Let each of us ask—in whose business am I engaged? Whose work am I doing? Am I the servant of Christ? Is the advancement of religion in my own soul, and in the souls of others, the chief object of my life? If not, you are not a child of God, for it is meat and drink to his children, to be about their Father's business. May we, like Mary, "keep all these sayings, and ponder them in our hearts."

NOTE on v. 35.—"A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Epiphanius thinks this intimates that the Virgin Mary would in due time die as a martyr. Augustine and Bede refer it, with more truth, to Mary's sorrow at the time of our Lord's crucifixion.

CHAP. III.

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST—HE WARNS THE MULTITUDE TO AVOID FORMALITY—TRUE REPENTANCE DESCRIBED.

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of re-

pentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance; and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not; John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things, in his exhortation, preached he unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him; and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the son* of Heli, Which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Janna, which was *the son* of Joseph, Which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Amos, which was *the son* of Naum, which was *the son* of Esli, which was *the son* of Nagge, Which was *the son* of Maath, which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Semei, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Juda, Which was *the son* of Johanna, which was *the son* of Rhesa, which was *the son* of Zorobabel, which was *the son* of Salathiel, which was *the son* of Neri, Which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Addi, which was *the son* of Cosam, which was *the son* of Elmodam, which was *the son* of Er, Which was *the son* of Jose, which was *the son* of Eliezer, which was *the son* of Jorim, which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, Which was *the son* of Simeon, which was *the son* of Juda, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Jonan, which was *the son* of Eliakim, Which was *the son* of Melea, which was *the son* of Menan, which was *the son* of Mattatha, which was *the son* of Nathan, which was *the son* of David, Which was *the son* of Jesse, which was *the son* of Obed, which was *the son* of Booz, which was

the son of Salmon, which was *the son* of Naason, Which was *the son* of Aminadab, which was *the son* of Aram, which was *the son* of Esrom, which was *the son* of Phares, which was *the son* of Juda, Which was *the son* of Jacob, which was *the son* of Isaac, which was *the son* of Abraham, which was *the son* of Thara, which was *the son* of Nachor, Which was *the son* of Saruch, which was *the son* of Ragau, which was *the son* of Phalec, which was *the son* of Heber, which was *the son* of Sala, Which was *the son* of Cainan, which was *the son* of Arphaxad, which was *the son* of Sem, which was *the son* of Noe, which was *the son* of Lamech, Which was *the son* of Mathusala, which was *the son* of Enoch, which was *the son* of Jared, which was *the son* of Maleleel, which was *the son* of Cainan, Which was *the son* of Enos, which was *the son* of Seth, which was *the son* of Adam, which was *the son* of God.

HAVING left the youthful Messiah in retirement, and in subjection to his reputed parents, St. Luke proceeds in his narrative, to the history of John the Baptist. He, too, had passed the early part of his life in obscurity, and in preparation for that important office which he was to fill; and then, about his thirtieth year, he came forth to discharge his public ministry. This was in fulfilment of a prophecy, uttered above seven hundred years before by the prophet Isaiah, who spoke of John, as a "voice crying in the wilderness," and preparing the way of the Lord;* and then described the effect which the Gospel would produce, and which is in exact accordance with what spiritually takes place, when a person is brought under its influence. The valleys are filled, or the meek and lowly are enriched with grace: the mountains and hills are made low—the proud are humbled; the crooked ways are made straight—the perverse hearts of men are directed to embrace the Gospel, and live in obedience to it: the rough ways are made smooth—all difficulties are removed, and the way to heaven is made plain by the Gospel of Jesus. Let us recollect, that such are the effects of the Gospel, and if it has not lowered our pride, corrected our ungodly propensities, and cleared away the difficulties which opposed our progress, we are not under its saving influence.

While John was boldly preaching the doctrine of repentance, there came many who expressed a desire for his baptism; but apprehending that the majority of them were taking up a profession of religion upon light and erroneous grounds, he cautioned them upon two important points—first, the vanity of trusting to a mere external profession—"Begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father." Because men

* Isaiah xl. 3, 4.

have been born of professing Christian parents, and have been educated in a Christian land, they take for granted that they are real Christians. Alas! how many such will be sorely disappointed when Christ, whose name they profess, shall disown them at the last day. The sentence will be,—"Depart from me, all ye that work iniquity." * Let the workers of iniquity belong to the purest Church on earth, it will not screen them in the least from the wrath of the great Judge.

The second point which John pressed upon these persons was, the necessity of their renouncing those sins to which they were addicted—as an evidence of the reality of their faith. "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." He then points out to several, those things which needed correction in their lives, and which could not be retained, if they were influenced by religion. Let us not mistake this matter: John did not direct the people to the offices of charity: or the publicans, to the observance of honesty; or the soldiers, to a disposition of peacefulness and contentment, *in order* that they might obtain repentance; but, in answer to their question, "what shall we do?" (that is, what fruit shall we bring forth as evidence of our sincerity,) he points to those things wherein their conduct was faulty, and shows that if their repentance was genuine, those fruits of reformation would undoubtedly follow. Repentance is a change of heart—from ignorance to knowledge—from sin to holiness—from the world to God—effected in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the gift of God, and Jesus is exalted to bestow it.† It is the same as that saving change of heart, which our Lord calls, the being "born again." It is salvation begun. It is not the partial lopping off of some irregularities in the life, but it is the laying of the axe to the root of all known sin, so that whatever is opposed to the will of God, falls to the ground, and whatsoever is agreeable to his will, springs up; and thus the man who has received the gift of repentance is, altogether, "a new creature." The baptism of John was merely an external ceremony, to denote the inward influence which the Spirit of Christ could, and would produce, in the hearts of those who were partakers of it. As in baptism, the water washes away the filth of the flesh, so the Holy Spirit, which was represented by the water, washes away the pollutions of the soul. In this way the Holy Spirit was, long before, promised to the church; "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean;

* Matt. vii. 22, 23. † Acts v. 31.

from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." *

We are denominated Christians, from our professing, in baptism, to become the followers of Christ: but the mere rite of baptism, however excellent, and necessary as an appointed sacrament of God, can never constitute us true Christians. It can of itself, no more raise a dead soul to life, than the laying of Elisha's staff upon the face of the dead child, could re-animate its breathless corpse.† We must likewise have the inward sprinkling of the Spirit, who purifies the heart, and leaves us not with a barren and fruitless profession. Let each of us ask, have I been thus baptized with the Holy Ghost? Have the outward irregularities of my life been corrected, and the inward, unholy and unclean propensities of my heart, been checked? Do I hate sin, and do I pray for the destruction of its power within me? Do I love holiness, and do I pray for a growing conformity to the holy image of God? If these questions cannot be satisfactorily answered, we have every reason to believe that our very baptism increases our condemnation. The heirs of glory must all undergo this refining process. Heaven is a holy place, and sin has corrupted the heart of man. You must, therefore, be made holy, before you can enjoy heaven, and the Holy Spirit is the appointed agent to prepare the heart for glory. Pray, therefore, for the Holy Spirit to effect this preparatory change in your heart. Be encouraged to do so, for our Lord himself has said—"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."‡

The chapter concludes with an account of John's imprisonment—of our Lord's entrance on his public ministry, at the age of thirty years—and with a statement of his pedigree, in order to show that he was lineally descended from Abraham, David, and all those persons from whom the promised Messiah was to come, according to his human nature. How glorious is God's faithfulness!—though ages pass away, his word remains, and all his promises must be fulfilled.

* Ezek. xxxvi. 25. † See 2 Kings iv. 29—31. ‡ Luke xi. 13.

CHAP. IV. 1—15.

CHRIST IS TEMPTED BY SATAN—HIS MODES OF TEMPTATION EXPLAINED.

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungred. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

THE victory which our blessed Lord obtained over Satan, at the time of his temptation in the wilderness, is calculated to afford continual comfort to the people of God in their spiritual conflicts; for He who conquered Satan, fights for them, and enables them to prevail. It may justly fill us with wonder, to behold the Son of God suffering himself to be assaulted by the prince of darkness. No doubt the malignity of Satan was excited to the highest pitch, when he saw the Son of God clothed in human nature, and now made manifest to bruise the serpent's head. Thus a peculiar honour was conferred on man, for not only was the Lord gracious to him, whilst the fallen angels were reserved in chains for the judgment of the great day; but the victory over Satan was to be effected by human nature taken into union with the godhead, in the second person of the Trinity.* Let us remember that the members of Christ

* "Behold he is among the wrestlers, who as God awards the prizes. He is among the crowned, who crowns the heads of the saints."—*Cyril.*

must expect to be attacked by the same adversary, for Satan, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour," and therefore suits his temptations to our particular state. Are we poor?—he tempts us to repine, and to envy. Are we rich? he tempts us to waste our Lord's property, and to squander on ourselves, what was lent for his service. And where shall we flee for help? it is very manifest that we have no strength of our own to resist. We must look to the conquering Saviour. He can afford shelter from the attacks of the adversary, for he has proved himself to be his superior. Oh! that we hated more deeply the yoke of Satan's bondage: then should we rejoice in the Saviour's conquest; we should ask him to conquer the power of sin within us, and to establish there his kingdom of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

In considering our Lord's temptation, we may observe, that three attempts were made to put him off his guard, and to lead him into sin. The attack was made in the wilderness, where our Lord had gone for retirement and prayer, and Satan is often most busy in the moments of retirement, when we least expect his assaults—perhaps when we are seeking God in prayer. As our Lord had been fasting for forty days, Satan suggests the propriety of his performing a miracle to satisfy his wants. But this would have implied a distrust in the promise of God, who was pledged to supply the wants of his people; he refused, therefore, to adopt this method of relief. And shall the Christian doubt the promises of God, or shall he suspect him of neglect and forgetfulness? far be this from him—divine help may be delayed, but it will be sure in the end.

In the temptation of our first parents, the devil represented to them the forbidden fruit—first, as "good for food," and then, as "pleasant to the eyes;" and they were overpowered by both these charms. Here, again, Satan goes over the same ground; he first tempted Christ to turn stones into bread, which would be "good for food," and then showed him "the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," which were "pleasant to the eyes:" but in both these efforts Satan failed. In the devil's promise of the kingdoms of this world to Christ, there are three insolent lies—against the sovereignty, justice, and providence of God. But even if he had them at command, they would have formed no allurement to Christ, whose kingdom was not of this world. Alas! what numbers do we see falling down to worship Satan for the sake of worldly gain? He is often *permitted* to make use of this world's goods, and with such glittering baits, he

deceives men to their destruction. Could any person obtain all that Satan promised to bestow—could he possess the whole world, and the sure enjoyment of all its pleasures during a thousand years, as his recompense for obeying Satan and neglecting Christ, he would, through the countless ages of eternity, curse his own folly in making so bad a bargain. Yet, millions lose their souls for the sake of the most trivial gain, or the most worthless indulgence—nay, from mere sloth and negligence; for whatever the object be for which men refuse or forsake Christ, that is the price for which Satan purchases their souls: and when they accept the price to neglect Christ, they do, in fact, fall into his wiles. Shall we believe the soothing lies of that cruel murderer of souls, or shall we listen to the voice of Jesus, warning us of his devices, and urging us to choose that better portion which he freely offers—namely, pardon, holiness, and eternal glory? May the Lord direct our hearts to make a happy choice on this momentous subject!

The third assault which Satan made upon our Lord, was, by urging him to throw himself down from one of the highest parts of the temple of Jerusalem; and to enforce compliance, he not only insinuated that this public exhibition of his power, so superior to that of nature, would prove him to be the Son of God; but as our Lord had quoted Scripture, in warding off his attacks, he thinks to turn this weapon against him, and therefore rudely forces a passage of Holy Writ from its proper meaning, to meet his purpose, saying:—"It is written, he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Here was plausible reasoning; but it was false, and our Lord detected it. The passage is to be found in the 91st Psalm, but with this addition:—He shall "keep thee *in all thy ways*." These words were omitted by Satan, who loves to garble Scripture; he knew that an ostentatious casting of himself from this battlement, was none of the ways marked out for Christ, (or for any believer,) in which he might depend on divine protection. Christ, therefore, confuted him by a reply from Scripture: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

We may learn much from the conduct of our Lord, on this occasion. God is not bound by any promise to comply with our vain desires, or to protect us where duty does not call us. If we are placed in danger while acting in obedience to the word of God, we may expect protection; but how many do we see

voluntarily plunging themselves into scenes of vanity and dissipation, or of vice and wickedness, who yet foolishly seem to expect to come out uninjured! Let us, therefore, never select for ourselves those situations or circumstances which tend to divert the heart from God. Temptations we must expect, but we must not run into them—when assaulted by any, let us immediately fly to our merciful High Priest, "who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," and who is able and willing to succour them that are tempted.

NOTE.—What St. Luke gives as the last temptation, (v. 9.) St. Matthew gives as the second; it is evident from the words, "Get thee hence, Satan," that the arrangement of the latter is the correct one. Matt. iv. 10.

CHAP. IV. 16—44.

JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF NAZARETH—EXPOUNDS THE SCRIPTURES—MANY OFFENDED AT HIS WORDS.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, *a city* of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way, And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and

cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, *thou* Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word *is* this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he, rebuking *them*, suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

OUR blessed Lord, after he had entered upon his ministry, employed *every* day in the execution of his work; but he availed himself especially of the opportunity which the Sabbath afforded him, to instruct the people. At Nazareth, where he had been brought up, "he went into the synagogue, as his custom was,"—an expression much to be noted, because it shows the honour which Christ put on the ordinances of his Father's house—though often administered by unfit instruments. Having been called upon to read the portion of scripture appointed for the day, he stood up and read a passage from the prophet Isaiah, and then sat down to expound it. His exposition, or comment, is not given us; but the substance of it is set before us, in few but comprehensive words. The passage is to be found in the 61st chapter of Isaiah, and contains a plain description of the office of the Messiah.* While the people anxiously listened to our Lord, he told them that the prophecy was *then* fulfilled in himself. The completion of this prophecy is calculated to afford strong consolation to us, as it assures us that that Saviour has come who holds out pardon to the guilty, and peace to the broken-hearted. But let us ask ourselves, are we the poor of whom the prophet speaks? poor in a spiritual sense, from a conviction of our guilty state? have we been distressed in mind, not merely from worldly causes, but from a sense of our sinfulness?

* See Isaiah lxi. 1.

or are we apprehensive that we are still detained in that captive state in which Satan holds all by nature? Let us rejoice that there is a Saviour who can deliver us from the bands of our sins, and break those chains in which we are held.

While Jesus commented upon these comforting words, the people attentively listened. So far they excelled many outward worshippers of the present day, who, instead of listening to the minister's exposition of God's word, often allow their worldly matters to occupy their thoughts, or sink into careless indifference. These people listened to our Lord's sermon, and "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." Alas! the very same truths delivered amongst ourselves, are heard with indifference. The work and office of Christ are often explained, and all the wonders of redeeming love are opened to our view, and yet no admiration is excited; yea, the talents of the speaker may be admired, while the subject on which he speaks is overlooked. But would this be the case if men felt their need of his salvation? No, surely, they would be filled with wonder at the offer of peace and pardon from an offended God.

Still, though these people in the synagogue listened to our Lord's sermon, and wondered at it, yet it made no impression upon them. Their prejudices against his lowly birth prevailed, and they would not obey him. How many are there of this character, who hear the gospel, and to a certain degree approve it, while yet they are not effectually changed by it. They are still under the influence of prejudice and passion, and sit in judgment on their ministers' words, instead of yielding obedience to their directions. What is gratifying to their feelings they will receive, but whatever tends to the mortifying of their pride, or the subduing of their besetting sins, they will not endure. May the example before us, put us on our guard! This day is the Scripture fulfilled in our ears, as truly as in the day when Jesus read them in the synagogue. Jesus is still the anointed Saviour: still does he retain and execute the commission given him by the Father: still does he say to the oppressed—Go free. One thing more deserves attention in the quotation here given from Isaiah. The Lord Jesus broke off in the middle of a verse—thereby showing that a part only of the prophet's word was fulfilled—those which refer to "the day of vengeance," have in view not the *first*, but the *second* coming of the Messiah, when he shall cast his enemies into the wine-press of his wrath.*

* Isaiah lxiii. 1—3.

But worse than indifferent was the conduct of the Nazarenes. Our Lord had justified himself for refusing the same display of miracles amongst them, as he had exhibited elsewhere, by quoting the example of two of the prophets, Elijah and Elisha, who dispensed their favours amongst strangers, rather than among their own countrymen, and that, no doubt by divine direction.* And he argued that if *they* acted thus, without being called to account for their conduct, why should not HE be allowed to exercise his discretion, in selecting appropriate places for the display of his power? This, however, so enraged the Nazarenes, that they proceeded to acts of violence, and would have cast him from the hill on which their city was built, had he not withdrawn himself from their reach.

There is no subject at present which more excites the anger of the world, than this very one, viz. the free grace and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. Men are inclined to tie down the Saviour, by laws of their own enacting, and then speak of him as being *unjust*, if he does not act as they think right. But, be it known to us all, that the Lord Jesus will manifest the glory of his grace upon whomsoever HE pleases, without calling man into his councils, or subjecting his conduct to their approval. All that Christ does, is in perfect justice. His acts will hereafter be justified: but we have no more reason to ask him, why he calls one person by his grace, and does not call another, than the Nazarenes had, for his not performing the same miracles among them, as he had done at other places.

All the miracles recorded in this chapter—the healing of the man possessed with a devil—the cure of Simon's wife's mother, and that of the numerous sick and diseased who came for relief, are intended to show the willingness of Christ to heal the disease of our souls; and if we are not cured, it will be owing to *our own unwillingness* to receive it on his terms. Let us pray that God would enable us thankfully to accept the invitation of the Gospel.

* 1 Kings xvii 9—16. 2 Kings v. 14.

CHAP. V. 1—16.

THE PEOPLE PRESS UPON CHRIST TO HEAR HIM—MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES—PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN FOLLOW CHRIST—A LEPER CLEANSED.

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so *was* also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold, a man full of leprosy; who seeing Jesus, fell on *his* face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And he charged him to tell no man: but go and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

It is curious to observe the different reception which our Lord met with at the various places which he visited in the course of his ministry. At one time the people were ready to stone him, at another, they begged him to remain with them: again, they were anxious to "cast him down headlong" from the top of a hill; and now we read of their "pressing upon him to hear the word of God." Just so is it in the present day. The Gospel of Christ is abused by some, and welcomed by others. May we be amongst the number of those who feel their need of the remedy which it declares. But let us not imagine that a formal attendance at the house of God, will be considered as "pressing to hear the word of God." We must go with a sense of want

and ignorance, and with a longing desire for a supply of spiritual instruction. We must go, not so much to hear what the *preacher* says, but rather what God declares through him; and if we despise or neglect his warning, spoken agreeably to the word of God, it is the same as if we rejected the word of God himself.

As the people were anxious for instruction, our Lord chose a situation from which he might more conveniently address them. He went into a fishing boat, belonging to Simon Peter, and "taught the people out of the ship." None who seek instruction from the Saviour, shall ever be disappointed. After thus preaching from the boat, our Lord expressed a wish that Peter should put out to sea, and let down his nets for a draught. Peter pleads as his apology, that he had spent the whole night in fruitless toil, and would seem at first, to consider our Lord's proposal as a useless experiment. He soon, however, corrects himself, and says, "Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." The consequence was, that a miraculous number of fishes was enclosed; so much so, that Peter was obliged to call for the assistance of his partners, and two ships were filled with the produce of their draught.

The whole of this passage is a fit picture of our present state —the ship is an emblem of the church, where Christ sits to direct and preserve all. The fishermen are God's duly authorized ministers—their ordination emboldens them to cast out the Gospel net, and sooner or later, success will attend the effort. To such, the conduct of Peter on this occasion speaks most forcibly. They are entrusted with the Gospel net; but how often does it happen, that they grow weary with their work, when they do not find it prospering as much as they expect. When the word of God urges them to preach the Gospel, and says to them, in the words of our Lord—"Let down your nets for a draught"—they are often inclined to answer, "we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." But shall the fisherman toil and labour for "the meat which perisheth," while the minister of the Gospel goes about his work with indifference? Shall the one expose himself to hardship, privation, and danger, merely to earn his livelihood, and shall the other live in self-indulgence and ease, while his work is to win souls to Christ, and to rescue them from the hands of Satan? Oh! that there were more fishermen in the ship, who would labour in faith, and not yield to the difficulties that encompass them. The *duty* of labour belongs to the minister, the *result* is in the hands of God, and though he may have toiled long and taken nothing,

yet let him not fail to cast the net on every opportunity, and like Peter, he may have to rejoice most, when he least expects it.

On seeing this miracle, Peter was seized with fear, and falling at Jesus' knees, he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Here was great sincerity, in that he felt unworthy to remain in the presence of the Lord Jesus, and therefore, in an attitude of humility, he threw himself at his feet. Well for us if we are found in this attitude every day, not merely saying prayers, but *praying*. There may have been a mixture of ignorance in his prayer, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." We cannot suppose that he wished Christ to remove from him and desert him; but in the feeling of his sinfulness and Christ's holiness, he felt his presence almost too much for him. Had he *then* fully known Christ's grace to perishing sinners, he would have united *confidence* to *humility*—the Lord deals with us after his tender mercy, and therefore we need not ask him to "depart," but rather seek his face and live.

Peter, James, and John, were so struck by this miracle, that on reaching the shore, they left their *all* and followed Jesus, in order that they might become fishers of men. This was the more remarkable, as their trade had never before flourished so well—they had two boats full of fish: but the service of Christ had more attraction than the money which their fish would sell for, and they left all for his sake. We are not all required to devote ourselves to the work of the ministry as these persons were, but we are required to forsake *every thing* which in the slightest degree interferes with our serving Christ faithfully, in that station of life in which we are placed.

The cure of the leprous man affords us valuable instruction. The leprosy was a disease which marked the anger of God, and which obliged the person who was afflicted with it, to be separated from the rest of the congregation; and it was a disease which God alone could cure. We all by nature have hearts which are afflicted with the leprosy of sin—it excludes us from enjoying the company of God's people here, and, unless removed, will exclude us from the society of the saints in glory. God alone can cure the malady of sin. Not all our efforts will avail to atone for a single transgression. The blood of Christ alone can cleanse us. The poor man who was diseased, came in humble faith to Jesus, being certain of his power, but doubtful of his inclination; he says, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean;" then Jesus immediately answers—"I will, be thou clean," and he was instantly restored to health. You see then

that Jesus is as willing as he is able to remove your sin. But are you willing to be healed? Alas! many love their sins: they would like to be saved at the last, if they might enjoy the world now: but are you willing to renounce the pomps and vanities of this evil world—to be delivered from the love of sin, and to be saved by Christ upon his own terms? If not, you may soon in hell lift up your eyes in torments. If you are ever saved, you must submit to be made holy. If you really desire holiness, you should hear for your comfort what Jesus says—"I will, be thou clean." Upon the warrant of the cure which he performed, you may go and ask him to heal you.

CHAP. V. 17—39.

CHRIST HEALETH ONE SICK OF THE PALSY—THE CALL OF MATTHEW—CHRIST THE GOOD PHYSICIAN—WHY HIS DISCIPLES DID NOT THEN FAST.

And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay *him* before him. And when they could not find by what *way* they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the Scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day. And after these things he went forth, and saw a Publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of Publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their Scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with Publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise *the disciples* of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is

with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was *taken* out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old *wine* straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

THE first verse of this portion of Scripture mentions that the power of the Lord was present to heal those Scribes and Pharisees who came out of every town to see the Lord Jesus. Some of them seemed to have experienced his gracious relief, but the end of the chapter informs us, that for the most part, they cavilled against his mercy to sinners; most likely they came together in this spirit, and so hardened their hearts against his truth. Is this your case, or do you wish to be taught by his Spirit? Do you wish to be a real Christian, regardless of what the world may think of you? Are you willing to learn and to follow the way of eternal life, though Scribes and Pharisees sit by and mock you? Go to Jesus in prayer; learn from him out of his holy word, and then shall you experience the power of his grace to the healing of your souls.

What strong encouragement does every portion of Scripture afford to those who are "seeking the Lord, if haply they may find him:" and not only are individuals encouraged to pray for themselves, but for their friends also. We here read of a poor palsied creature, who was carried by his friends to the house where Jesus was, and when they could not enter by reason of the crowd, they proved their anxiety for his cure, by stripping part of the roof of the house, and letting him down into the presence of Jesus.* Nothing is told us of *the man's* faith in the power of Christ, or of his wish to make trial of it; the whole seems to have been the act of *his friends*, and we are told that Jesus, seeing *their* faith, healed him. Do you know the Saviour's power in the pardon of your sins, and have you friends who care for none of these things? Carry them in the arms of faith, and lay them in prayer before the Saviour: plead before him his own act in the case of the friends of the palsied person, and ask him to do now for you, as he then did for them.

The love and condescension of Christ are strikingly displayed

* In Shaw's travels we have a full account of the eastern house, which shews how the man might be let down from the roof into the middle court. See Horne's Introduction. Vol. iii. p. 418.

in several events which this chapter records. We hear of his calling Levi, or Matthew, to be one of his disciples, and afterwards to be an apostle and an evangelist. This was remarkable, because his trade was not only of the lowest kind, but such as made him odious to the Jews, for he assisted the Roman government in the collection of the public taxes. But the Lord judgeth not as man judgeth. He can form the most useful instruments for his work, out of the most unpromising materials. He called Levi, as he sat "at the receipt of custom," or, in other words, as he sat in his office, discharging the duties of his lucrative employment. Humanly speaking, it was not likely that he would leave his worldly concerns, and, at once, obey the call; but the Saviour who called, gave him the inclination, and therefore the power to obey. His conduct is recorded as an example for us. Although we may not be called to the ministry as he was, yet the Gospel demands of us, with all authority, that we should follow the Lord Jesus with earnestness and decision.

Levi acted promptly, "he conferred not with flesh and blood," but obeyed without hesitation or delay. So should we: the call comes *now*, it may never be repeated. His obedience was self-denying—he gave up a profitable trade, because it interfered with the command of Christ. So should we resign, without reluctance, whatever clogs our feet in the spiritual race, whether it be worldly gain, or worldly pleasure.* His obedience was also determined. We never hear of his expressing a wish, afterwards, to return to his former employment, or of his regretting that he had made so great a sacrifice. Nor should we ever look back, after having once put our hand to the plough.

Nor will the Christian less follow the example of Levi, in his gratitude. We are told that he "made a great feast in his house," to which the Saviour was invited. Thus he honoured his Lord, by acknowledging him as such, in the face of the whole company, and showed his anxiety for his former associates, by bringing a great number of them to an acquaintance with Jesus, hoping, no doubt, that it might be for their benefit. This shows us how, as Christians, we should use our influence. We should not only confess Christ before the world, but we should take every opportunity of leading those into "the narrow path," with whom we formerly walked in "the broad way."

* Heb. xii. 1, 2.

The Pharisees objected to our Lord's associating with the Publicans. What a proof was this of their uncharitable pride, and of the Saviour's condescension! He "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Had men been *righteous*, they had no need of a Saviour, and therefore his mission was to Adam's posterity as a guilty world. They who depend on their fancied righteousness, can have no real view of Christ's vicarious work. From them, as from the Pharisees of old, Christ turns away, whilst the humble, self-abased sinner, finds a welcome with the Saviour. What opinion have we of ourselves? If we are high in our own estimation, Christ will be lowly esteemed; but if we feel that we are vile, polluted sinners, and smart under the goadings of an accusing conscience, then will the Saviour be precious; we shall rejoice to hear that he is a spiritual Physician who can heal our sin-sick souls.

Christ's careful attention to the situation of his disciples was manifested by calling them to their several duties, at the best time and in due proportion. He would not "put new cloth on an old garment," nor "new wine into old bottles." When they received the fulness of the Spirit, they were better fitted to enter on fasting, and such like mortifications, in a spiritual frame of mind—without which men either regard fasting as a drudgery or make it a saviour. As long as the "bridegroom was with them," it would be inconsistent to adopt this token of mourning—but when he was removed they would practise this and other acts of self-denial, which, though outward, are both significant and useful. When we fast or abstain from food with the design of mortifying the appetites of the body, or of cultivating a tone of feeling suited to prayer and self-examination, it will be found a great help and a means of grace. But if entered on in a legal spirit, or with self-righteous motives, it will, like all good things abused, end in pride and hardness of heart. May we do all things with a single eye to God's glory, and find, by blessed experience, that "His service is perfect freedom."

Christ's declaration—that new wine must not be put into old bottles, was intelligible to his hearers, who always used leathern bottles or skins for holding their wine, which new wine would burst, if they were not new and sound. The meaning has been shown on the subject of fasting, viz. that we are not to put things together which do not agree, and it may be applied to all those vain mixtures which men would make, between grace and works—the Law and the Gospel—the service of God

and the service of Mammon. There must be no patch-work in religion—all must be from God. It is equally true, that "no man having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new, for he saith, the old is better" *—God's truth is from the beginning—but of man's novelties, like the traditions of the Pharisees, there is no end—let us keep to the "good old paths" of truth and peace; and let us pray never to give them up for any human opinions and inventions.

CHAP. VI. 1—19.

WORKS OF NECESSITY AND MERCY ARE LAWFUL ON THE SABBATH—THE HEALING OF A WITHERED HAND—CHRIST CHOOSETH TWELVE APOSTLES —ON PRAYER.

And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn-fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing *them* in *their* hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the Priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the Scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath-day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath-days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy *it?* And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus. And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called *unto him* his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the *son* of Alphæus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases;

* New wine was more agreeable to the *taste*, and therefore many passages in the Old Testament speak of the preference given to it; but the old wine was more wholesome and nourishing, and therefore better than new wine.

And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed *them* all.

THIS chapter contains our Lord's exposition of the moral law, as regards the observance of the Sabbath. The Pharisees had charged his disciples with a breach of the Sabbath, for plucking the ears of corn and rubbing them in their hands on that day; conceiving it to be all the same as though they had thrashed the grain. But our Lord justified their conduct by showing that it was a work of necessity: their hunger had been induced by their attendance on him, and they did no more than satisfy the wants of nature, which, after David's example, would have been allowable, even though opposed to the strict letter of the law. We learn from this, that God never intended that the observance of the Sabbath should militate against the real wants or happiness of man. Let us not, however, turn this liberty into licentiousness, or, from the concession here granted, take occasion to indulge in those acts which neither promote the glory of God or the welfare of man, but gratify our love of pleasure or of worldly occupation.

On another occasion, our Lord himself was charged by the Scribes and Pharisees with the crime of curing a man on the Sabbath-day: but he appealed to their consciences whether such an act, being an act of mercy, did not come within the line of strict obedience—had he not saved life, when he could, it would have been destroying it. If, like him, we do not do good, when opportunities offer, we must do evil. And thus with our Sabbaths, if we are not occupied in communion with God, or in benefiting man, we must be occupied in doing evil.

The case of this poor man's cure deserves our attention: he had a withered hand which made it totally devoid of power; yet the Saviour says to him, "Stretch forth thy hand." Had he been inclined to cavil at Christ's word, he might have pleaded his inability—he might have said to Jesus, "you desire me to do a thing which is impossible,"—but no such expression escaped his lips. 'Tis true, he could not of himself stretch forth his hand, but he did what he was desired; he made the effort, and in doing so, the power which he wanted was given. Let those persons here learn a lesson, who labour under the disease of sin, and yet make their infirmity an excuse for their neglect of the means of recovery. None of us can do a single thing of ourselves—we cannot even pray aright till the spirit of prayer be given us; but yet we are commanded to pray, and we have no

more reason to say, "I will not go upon my knees till God gives me the spirit of prayer," than the man we read of, would have been right in saying, "I will not attempt to stretch out my hand till God makes it whole." We find that God works by means, and if we wish to obtain what we want, we must be found in the use of those means, otherwise God will not bestow them. The duty is ours—the power to fulfil it comes from God—our inability does not release us from God's demands—grace is not the rule but the help of duty.

The appointment of the twelve apostles to their office, is here related, and the conduct of our blessed Lord on this occasion, deserves our attentive consideration. "He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." On this occasion, Jesus acted in his character of mediator. As it becomes us to ask direction from God before we engage in any matter of importance, so did He: this, we may suppose, was partly the subject of that prayer which he offered up, and also that those whom he might select, should be peculiarly fitted for their work. It was the prayer of the great bishop before the ordination of his first ministers. But this act of our Lord's is recorded for our imitation: not that God expects us to spend whole nights in prayer, for that would probably, (unless in some very peculiar circumstances,) render us unfit for the duties of the ensuing day; but we are required to "continue in prayer, and to watch thereunto with thanksgiving:" and the more nearly we can approach to the example of our Lord, in the frequency and urgency of our prayers, the more remarkable will be the answers that we shall receive, and the more abundant the communications of God to our souls. If we wrestled more like Jacob,* we should certainly prevail to a greater extent than in general we do. We all have occasions that call for direction and assistance from God, and on these occasions, we should go and spread our wants before the throne of grace. The command is—"In *every* thing, by prayer and supplication, with "thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." † "In *all our* ways we must acknowledge him, and he will direct our paths." Prayer has often been called the pulse of the soul, and truly it is so, for by our regard to it, we may discern the state of our souls, much better than we can, by the pulse, the state of the body. Judging ourselves by this rule, are we in a state of spiritual health or not? If we are prayerless people,

* See Gen. xxxii. 24, 26. † Phil. iv. 6.

we are altogether dead in trespasses and sins. If our supplications are habitually cold and formal, they denote a very unhealthy state of the soul. No prayer will enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts, but that which is offered "in spirit and in truth." Let us plead for the spirit of prayer, and when once we taste the pleasure of communion with God, through Jesus Christ, it will prove the greatest source of enjoyment we can possess.

NOTE v. 1.—ἐν σαββάτῳ δευτεροπρώτῳ—may be rendered as here, "the second sabbath after the first," or better, "the first sabbath after the second," i. e. the second day of unleavened bread; when the sheaf or first fruits were offered, and from this to the Pentecost they reckoned fifty days. Other explanations of this phrase are given, but this seems the most satisfactory. See Lightfoot and Whitby.

CHAP. VI. 20—49.

CHRIST DECLARES WHO ARE BLESSED—LOVE TO OUR ENEMIES INCULCATED—REVENGE FORBIDDEN—THE HOUSE BUILT UPON THE ROCK—AND UPON THE SAND.

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed *be ye* poor: for your's is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed *are ye* that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe untoyou that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given

unto you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit: neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good: and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

AFTER the apostles had received their commission from our Lord, they came down with him into the plain, and vast numbers surrounded him, imploring relief from their bodily diseases, nor did they solicit his help in vain, for "there went virtue out of him and healed them all." Let us remember that he is still the same compassionate Saviour, and that virtue still goes out of him to heal all those who pray to be relieved from the dominion of sin. It was on the assembling of this multitude that our Lord took occasion to deliver his sentiments upon the character of those persons whom he considered truly blessed and truly wretched,* and though he addressed himself particularly to his disciples, the instruction was intended for all,—yes, even for *us*, for it cannot too often be impressed upon us, that we do not read the Scriptures with profit, until we find that they are addressed to ourselves, and read them as conveying a message from God, to our souls.

Let us now attend to what the Lord Jesus says concerning

* This discourse is not so full as the Sermon on the Mount. Matt. v. vi. vii. It was delivered on the plain, and not on a Mount; to the disciples, and not to the multitude: hence Greswell concludes that it is not the same as given by St. Matthew. See his Harmony and Dissertation. Vol. II.

happiness, and who he considers are really happy. The poor in spirit,—those who hunger after holiness and divine instruction, —those who mourn on account of their sins,—and those whose holy lives so much rebuke the worldly, that they separate them from their company. Now, why should these alone be considered happy?—because real blessedness consists in likeness to God, who is the fountain of perfection, and every Christian is conformed to his holy image in measure and degree—but it may be asked, are not many persons happy who do not answer to this description? Yes, they enjoy a certain kind of happiness, but it is unsatisfying at best, and it must be parted with at death.* The Christian enjoys real peace now, and he has glory in prospect beyond the grave. Not so the worldly person: his happiness has been derived from the world, and with the world it will end. Those whom the world often envy, are those upon whom our Lord denounces a woe. If happiness be the object of your desire, you must seek it in the way of God's appointment. Do you halt between two opinions? Say will you despise religion in the day of judgment? will you despise it when you see the difference put between the godly and the ungodly? And what is that which you prefer to it? Can you hope that your pleasures, your riches, or your honours will *satisfy* you? Go, ask of Solomon, who tried them all,† or ask of those around, who have made the experiment, and they must confess that every earthly enjoyment is delusive. Look for happiness, where alone it can be found, in the knowledge of an Almighty Saviour, and in the sense of pardon through his atoning blood: thus shall ye find rest to your souls.

The morality of the Gospel of Christ must be admired, even by its bitterest opposers. The law of retaliation, or revenge, has, in all nations, been fostered and approved of, but in the Christian code it is expressly forbidden. Two things in particular, we may remark, which are universally applauded among men, but which are contrary to the spirit of Christianity; viz. a rigid maintenance of our rights, and a keen resentment of injuries. We should pray for a patient, and a yielding spirit. If a man were to strike any of us upon the face, it would be better to submit to a second insult, than to resent it, for the blow would only hurt the body—resentment would wound the soul. If any person were to injure us in our property, by taking away one of our garments, it would be better to suffer a greater loss

* See Chap. xii. 19, 20. † Eccles. ii. 9—11.

than indulge in anger or revenge. The Lord does not set aside human laws which protect the rights of men, but he teaches us to lay aside all anger and revenge towards those who may injure us. It is one proof of real love to our enemies, when we would rather relinquish our goods than lose our meekness and charity towards them. We should always recollect that those who are guilty of doing violence to our persons or our property, injure *themselves* far more than they can possibly injure *us* : therefore we should be ready to implore forgiveness for them at the hands of God ; but this we cannot do without first forgiving them ourselves. All these precepts are difficult for us to observe, and indeed, in this case, as in all others, we are quite helpless without the preventing grace of Christ. Nothing but that grace can change the heart, and renew it after the image of God ; when this is effected, we have both the inclination and strength to observe these Christian precepts.

After censuring the conduct of those who form a rash and hasty judgment of others from a malicious disposition, our Lord next enforced the necessity of proving our love for him, by the holiness of our lives. To what purpose shall we make a vain show of respect to him, while we live in a uniform course of disobedience ? How just is his reproof : " Why call ye me Lord, Lord ! and do not the things that I say ? " Alas ! how often is the mere outside form of religion to be found, when there is no vital principle within ! In order to impress this important subject more fully, Christ represents by a striking parable the difference between the sincere believer, and the unsound professor of the Gospel. The sincere believer feels his helplessness, and comes to Jesus for instruction. His house is built on a sure basis. Christ, " the rock of ages," is the immovable foundation on which he rests : trials and temptations, like heavy storms, may beat upon him, but nothing shall be able to shake his hope ; while the mere nominal Christian, who rests upon forms and ceremonies, and an empty profession, shall be left defenceless in the day of his calamity, when the overflowing storm of divine anger shall light upon his baseless fabric—" and the ruin of that house shall be great ; " his very profession shall increase his condemnation. Such was the solemn declaration with which the Saviour closed his address to the people. May we lay it to heart, and may it lead us to strict and impartial self-examination. Since we must build for *eternity*, let us be sure of our foundation. How terrible will be the confusion of the ungodly, when the hail of God's wrath shall sweep away " their refuge of

lies," while the humble believer in Jesus shall rest upon his foundation, immovably firm.

CHAP. VII. 1—23.

THE CENTURION'S FAITH—THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED UP—JOHN SENDS MESSENGERS TO CHRIST.

Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick. And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare *him* stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about. And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. And John calling *unto him* two of his disciples sent *them* to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard: how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

EVERYTHING in this blessed Gospel is full of instruction; each

step we advance furnishes us with fresh proofs of the divine character and mission of the Lord Jesus. The account of his impressive sermon was contained in the last chapter, after which he retired to Capernaum, his usual residence. In this city there was a man of good reputation, who, it would seem, attended the worship of the true God, though a gentile; in all probability he had been converted to the knowledge of the true God by his intercourse with the Jews, without losing his gentile character —a case that often occurred at those times. Moreover, he proved that his zeal for God's true worship was great, for he built a synagogue from his own resources; thus, putting to shame the coldness of many professed Christians, who, with greater means, have contributed so little in building churches in our land. This man was a centurion, or captain, in the Roman army, and having heard of Jesus and his miracles, applied to him to relieve a favourite servant, who was at the point of death. His humility was remarkable. He would not go to make the demand himself, but employed the elders of the Jews to convey it; and when he found that the Saviour was coming, his sense of unworthiness increased, and he then went forth to meet him, saying that his house was not fit for the reception of such a guest, and that his wish could as easily be accomplished, though uttered at a distance from the patient, as his own orders were executed by those soldiers who were in obedience to him. Here was faith, and such as drew forth the cure that was desired, for his servant was healed in the very same hour.

Let us endeavour to apply this narrative to ourselves. Behold then, in this centurion a sense of want; an anxiety for relief; an application for it; a firm conviction of the power of the Saviour to impart it; an expectation of it: all these are the effects of *faith.* Do we possess the same, with regard to the concern of our souls? we, like the centurion, are unworthy, no doubt; but we see that worthiness is not necessary to recommend us to the Saviour. A sense of want and utter helplessness is our chief recommendation to him. Go and try—make the centurion's case your own; ask for the removal of your sins, with the same earnestness that the centurion asked for his servant's recovery, and you will find that all these miracles of healing were performed as pledges of the Saviour's power to remove the strength and punishment of sin.

The case of an afflicted widow next came under his observation. After leaving Capernaum, he went the day after into a city called Nain. Shall we say that *chance* took him there?

No, the Saviour had an object in every thing he did, and in every place which he visited. Mercy and love formed his object, and he wished now to display them in relieving this afflicted widow. On entering the city he met the solemn procession of a funeral—a distressed mother, who had been before bereaved of her husband, was now following to the grave her son—her only son—her chief support. As our Lord was partaker of our human feelings, he felt the tenderest compassion for the widow, and without any request from her, or others, interposed to wipe away her tears. But what comfort could be given to one who had lost her all? "Is anything too hard for the Lord!" He showed himself stronger than death, for instantly, with divine authority, he spoke the word and the dead revived; he restored to the poor woman her beloved child, in all the vigour of health. What an astonishing exhibition of mercy and power! No wonder that an event so uncommon should impress the spectators with a serious awe, and constrain them to acknowledge that "a great prophet had risen up among them, and that God had visited his people." And shall not we also be struck with a holy fear and reverence for the Saviour? Though we have not, indeed, witnessed a dead body raised to life, yet, the power of the Lord Jesus is equally manifest in raising up to "newness of life," many whose lives once proved that they were "dead in trespasses and sins." Do we then acknowledge his power, and ask him to exert it in our behalf—to raise us from a state of spiritual death to a life of holiness? Or have we no desire for such a change, and do we still prefer the enjoyment of sin? May God touch the hearts of those who thus think; for except they be "born again, they cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

We have seen in this chapter the tenderness of the Lord Jesus to a poor afflicted widow. Are there any amongst us overwhelmed with trouble or sorrow? to you we would say that Jesus is all-sufficient to support and comfort you. O, then direct your prayers to him, for what cannot his power effect? Death indeed may rob you of those who were the delight of your eyes, or the support of your declining days, but Jesus can do more for you than all earthly friends. He will be a husband to the widow—a parent to the orphan—a friend to the friendless—and a never-failing source of comfort to his believing people, however reduced or distressed. He does not willingly afflict you—the chastening has been sent in love and mercy to draw your heart from earthly things, that you may find your *all* in Christ. Improve every season of trial by private prayer and meditation

on the word of God, so shall you be enabled to say—"It is good for me that I have been afflicted"—"before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." *

The report of our Lord's miracles was carried by the disciples of John to their master, who was then in prison; and for *their* conviction, the Baptist took that opportunity of sending them with a message to Jesus, inquiring whether he were the Messiah or not. In reply, he condescended to give them the most satisfactory evidence, by the miracles he wrought in their presence, which we may suppose dispersed every doubt from their minds, and probably induced them to become his disciples after John's death. May all we hear and read of Jesus of Nazareth induce us to walk as becomes his true disciples.

CHAP. VII. 24—50.

JOHN'S OFFICE AND CHARACTER DESCRIBED—A WOMAN ANOINTS THE FEET OF JESUS—THE PHARISEE'S OBJECTIONS REPROVED BY CHRIST.

And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children. And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*,

* Psalm cxix. 67. 71.

he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Our Lord took occasion from the visit of John's disciples, to address the multitude concerning the Baptist, who had once appeared popular among them. He spoke of him in terms of approbation, as being firm and bold both in preaching and practice; not easily shaken like a reed by the wind—not seeking the pomps of the world, but a man of singular austerity and self-denial. He declared him to be superior to all the prophets that preceded him, in that he was the forerunner of Christ, and lived to see his day. He lamented the awful condition of those who rejected the Baptist's message, and turned from the Saviour whom he preached; and then complained of the perverseness of the men of that generation, who had shown the most absurd prejudices against them both, though for opposite reasons. They refused to attend to John, on account of his austerity, and they showed a dislike to Jesus for the freedom of his intercourse with people of all characters; yet the Saviour rejoiced that there were some who approved the wisdom of his conduct. The application to ourselves of what has just been read is very obvious. Alas, how many are there who betray a froward and cavilling temper like the pharisees! They are ready to censure every body whom they know to be religious, merely to furnish an excuse for their not becoming religious themselves: but let us recollect that we are not to be judged by comparison with any man, nor are we to take the conduct of any man as our guide. Though every religious person we know were to act inconsistently, yet that would neither justify *our* acting so, nor would it excuse *us* from

being religious. God's word is our rule, and by that we should be guided, without respect to the opinion of men.

Whenever an opportunity of usefulness occurred, our Lord was ready to embrace it; we lately heard of his visiting the house of a publican, and now he accepts the invitation of a Pharisee. On this occasion a circumstance happened which displayed the pride of the Pharisee and the love of the Saviour. A woman followed him into the house, and she was "a sinner." But it may be asked, was any thing remarkable in this? are we not all sinners? yet it is not said merely that she had sinned, but that she was "*a sinner*"—which imports that she had been a person of profligate character; her trade was that of a sinner. Such had been her former wretched life, but now she is altered; her very presence argues her change. Had she been still living in sin, she could no more have endured the sight of Christ, than the satanic being who possessed the man and cried out, "Art thou come to torment me." But she sought out Christ, and although the Pharisee's house was the place where *she* would be least welcome, yet did she overcome all fear of scorn, and found her way to the room where the Saviour reclined. No disadvantage can deter the awakened sinner from a speedy recourse to Jesus.

But whence came all her anxiety? Doubtless she had heard the Saviour preach, and his invitations to burdened sinners had reached her heart: she witnessed his condescension to others; she thought of herself, and made trial of his love. Behold her now in a different frame of mind from what she ever felt before. Even her love was turned another way, from things sensual to divine—her ointment was altered in its use: from being abused to luxury, it is now consecrated to devotion: her eyes which formerly were the inlets and outlets of sin, now stream with tears, and bedew the Saviour's feet: her hair, on the ornamenting of which so much precious time had been squandered, is now employed as a towel to wipe those feet; she considers the best of her possessions as honoured by being employed in her Saviour's service. All this was the fruit of gratitude—"behold how she loved him!" Whence was this change, but from the secret working of God's Spirit! "He smote the rock, and the waters gushed out." O Lord, smite our rocky hearts, that the waters of godly sorrow may burst forth. Have we ever wept like this woman at the Saviour's feet? Have we employed in his service the instruments of our former sin? God grant that our hearts may be changed like her's, and our conduct shall be the same also.

The Pharisee saw all this, but with an evil eye. He suspects the true character of Christ—he unjustly charges the woman with continuing to be what she had once been, though her change was evident: being free from gross sin, he conceived that he was far superior to this woman. How difficult is it to persuade the mere moralists, of their sinfulness: truly does our Lord say that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before them. Simon spoke *within* himself, but Jesus answered the thoughts of his heart, and so proved that he *was* a prophet. He then proposed a parable, supposing the case of two debtors to one creditor: the one owed a lesser sum—the other, a greater; both are forgiven: who then, he asks, will love most? Simon could not but answer—the one to whom the largest sum was forgiven. Jesus thus fastens conviction upon him, and obliged him to pass sentence upon himself in favour of her whom he condemned. Her tears of sorrowing love, and her other acts which he had witnessed, were the expression of her gratitude for sin already pardoned; while the cold reception which Simon gave him, having neglected to offer those customary tokens of respect which every guest was entitled to, proved that his love to the Saviour was still low and deficient. "Wherefore," says our Lord, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much:" not that the pardon of her sin was the consequence of her love, but her love was the consequence of her pardon.

Let us briefly apply this narrative to ourselves: God is our creditor, we all are debtors, some to a larger, and others to a smaller extent, but here we are *all* on a level—none of us have any thing to pay. We must go to that Saviour with whom is frank forgiveness. Let us implore the pardon of our sins through his blood, and let us recollect that, if pardoned, we cannot but love Jesus, and if we love, we cannot help showing it. In vain shall we profess to love, if our *all* is not at his service. Though Christ, the head of the body, is exalted beyond our reach of ministering personally to him—yet, let us bestow upon his feet—the members of his church on earth—our tears, our ointment, and whatever may testify our love to him:—remembering his own gracious word, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

NOTE on v. 37.—Gregory says, "We water the feet of our Lord with tears, if we are moved with compassion to any, even the lowest members of our Lord. We wipe our Lord's feet with our hair, when we shew pity to his saints by the sacrifice of those things with which we abound." Hom. 33.

CHAP. VIII. 1—25.

WOMEN MINISTER TO CHRIST OF THEIR SUBSTANCE—HE PROPOUNDETH THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER, AND OF THE CANDLE—CHRIST'S TRUE RELATIONS.

And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve *were* with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance. And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock: and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience. No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth *it* under a bed; but setteth *it* on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither *any thing* hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. Then came to him *his* mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. And it was told him *by certain* which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it. Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them,

Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.

MANY who for a time resorted to Jesus, soon withdrew from his company, having no relish for his conversation; but he had some attendants who were almost constantly with him. The twelve Apostles accompanied him always—these he chose as his witnesses; besides, certain pious women who had been healed of their infirmities, and converted by his grace, waited on him, and "ministered to him of their substance."* So mean and destitute was the condition of Jesus, while on earth, that he subsisted on the charity of others. Though we cannot, like these women, minister to Jesus in his person, yet we may, and ought, as far as in us lies, minister to the wants of his distressed members; for what is done to them, he considers as done to himself. If we, then, shut up our bowels of compassion from them, "how dwelleth the love of God in us."†

When many of the people were gathered from every city round about, Jesus spoke to them a parable; and although the meaning of it could scarcely have been misunderstood, yet our Lord yielded to the dulness of his disciples, and gave them a clear and distinct interpretation of it. Jesus is the sower, who by the preaching of the Gospel, scatters abroad the good seed of the word; his faithful ministers also are employed by him in doing the same in all ages of the church—but alas! the most excellent instruction does not always produce the desired effect. There is not a congregation, and scarcely a family, where there are not to be found persons who answer to the different characters here described. Some are hard and impenetrable as the ground on which they tread;—the seed is sown, but their hearts, like the highway, lie exposed, and Satan, ever watchful, destroys the seed before any impression can be made. Others are, in a degree, affected by the declaration of the Gospel, but their's is only a momentary emotion—like the shallow surface of clay which covers the rock, so do they give promise of fruitfulness: the word of truth is heard and received, but the rock beneath prevents its growth, and their fair professions wither, scorched by the sun of mockery and persecution. A third class seems

* Of these, the most noted were Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, (which shews that Christ's followers are often found, where we least expect;) and Mary Magdalene, "out of whom went *seven* devils,"—it is not said that she was a woman of a bad character. She is said to have been called Magdalene, from her husband, who was from Magdala. † 1 John iii. 17.

more hopeful—the blade springs up, and endures the various changes of the winter's cold; but here, too, the word becomes unfruitful, for cares and riches and pleasures engross the mind, and finally prevail over the more hopeful appearance of religion in them. However, the labour of the husbandman is not, in every instance, unfruitful; there are those who resemble the good ground, whose hearts are prepared by divine grace to receive the heavenly seed of the word: they perceive its importance, and cherish it in their hearts—they pray that the Lord would remove all the briars and thorns which would impede its growth; they pray for the dew of the Holy Spirit to water the seed when sown, which being thus placed under the care of the heavenly husbandman grows and flourishes. These persons walk worthy of their high calling, being fruitful in every good word and work: their sincerity is proved by their perseverance in holiness: they "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Let us make an application of this parable to ourselves; we have been favoured with the light of the Gospel—what, let us ask ourselves, is the effect produced on us by the blessed truths it teaches? Is our religion such as will carry us through temptations, trials, and persecution? Is it such as renders us superior to the allurements of sin? Is it strong enough to prevent our wasting that time on vanity, which should be devoted to the care of the soul? Let us not trifle with matters of such moment, but let us implore of the Lord Jesus to prepare our hearts for the reception of the truth, and to make it effectual to our salvation.

The Saviour subjoined a solemn caution to his disciples, reminding them, by the parable of the candle set in a candlestick, that divine light had been given to them for the benefit of others, as well as for themselves, and that they should show it forth in their lives and conversation. When a person is converted by the Spirit of God, there is a light placed in his mind which reason and philosophy cannot impart, and which no man can possess unless it be given him from above. God then "shines into his heart, and gives him the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." * But this is not to be a dormant principle; it must show itself; as a candle is placed to disperse its light around, so is the Christian. Do we ask how we may become lights of the world? The words of Christ on another occasion will direct us to the way of attaining it:—

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

"While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." * Faith conveys divine illumination to the otherwise darkened soul—we are then well fitted to reflect this light to those around us. The fruits of holiness and usefulness will appear in our daily walk, and men will be induced to seek the vitality of religion.

Observe what crowds attended the preaching of our Lord at this time. His mother and his brethren could not get near him. It appears probable, that they came from a foolish fear lest he should injure himself by too much speaking; but it was meat and drink to Jesus to be thus employed. His affection for Mary was indeed strong—but in a spiritual sense, his love towards his people is equally great—his true relations are described "as those who hear the word of God and do it." Blessed indeed is our lot if we are among God's adopted children—nothing can equal his love to us, if we are numbered amongst them—and from that love, nothing shall be able to separate us.

CHAP. VIII. 26—56.

CHRIST CASTETH OUT THE LEGION OF DEVILS—THEY ENTER THE SWINE—THE CHANGE IN THE DEMONIAC—CHRIST HEALETH THE WOMAN OF HER BLOODY ISSUE.

And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in *any* house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters: and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed *them* saw what was done, they fled, and went and told *it* in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid. They also which saw *it* told them by

* John xii. 36.

what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people *gladly* received him: for they were all waiting for him. And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him. And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind *him*, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanched. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter, and they that were with him, said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and, falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace. While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's *house*, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard *it*, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. And her parents were astonished; but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.

We lately heard the Saviour commanding the winds and waters, and they immediately obeyed him: here we read of him speaking in the same language to the evil spirits; he entreats not, he persuades not, but commands with authority. His love directed him across the lake, where a miserable object needed his assistance; he was possessed with devils, which gave him such supernatural strength that no ordinary force could bind or restrain him; he wandered about in the most lonesome places—an inhabitant of the tombs *—a burden to himself, and a terror to the neighbourhood. As soon as Jesus landed, this unhappy sufferer

* Whither he was driven by Satan, v. 29. Beza remarks that ἠλαύνετο refers to the violent course of a horse, when spurred on.

met him—intentionally on the part of Jesus—unwillingly on his own part, for the devils who possessed him would, if they could, have avoided the Saviour's presence. But the overruling power of Christ dragged the foul spirit into his presence. At first he humbly acknowledges his power, by calling him "Jesus the Son of the most high God." Satan's tone is altered since his first onset with Christ, *then* he said, "*If thou be* the Son of God,"* *now*, he confesses him to be such; then he said—"all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me"—now he says, "I *beseech* thee, torment me not." Christ gained the victory over him in the wilderness, and Satan is obliged to own it. How should this comfort us who groan under the attacks of Satan! Christ is able, yea, is willing to release us. Let us pray that he may do so.

The devils will ever love mischief; they see that they must leave the man, and they ask permission to possess a herd of swine, hoping to work in these Gadarenes a discontentment at Christ—an unwillingness to entertain him—a desire for his absence. Jesus granted their request, that such amongst them as denied the existence of spirits, might be fully convinced by the event: the wicked spirits have their wish; the swine are choked in the waves; the Gadarenes are offended, and beseech him to depart, whereas they ought to have praised his mercy, whose power might have allowed these spirits to seize on their persons instead of their swine. They put *him* from them, who alone was able to defend them from the power of the devil. Let us take care that we are not doing the same: if we reject the Saviour, we certainly act as they did.

But see what a change has been effected upon the poor demoniac: he who so lately wandered about in frantic wildness, is now tame and peaceable: he now "sits at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." What a picture, this, of that mighty change which takes place in the heart of him who is converted by the Spirit of God; more particularly of him whose mad career in dissipation knew no restraint: once the slave of Satan, and led captive by him, he has been freed by the power of Jesus, and he sits at his feet for instruction, clothed in his righteousness, and restored to his proper senses, which before he had utterly lost. No unconverted man is in his right mind: he follows the course of this world, and indulges in the wildest vanities, while within a few paces of the abyss of hell.

* Matt. iv. 3.

This poor man begged to remain with Jesus, but he permitted him not, having work for him to do elsewhere. Often is the new-born Christian so charmed with the Saviour, and so disgusted with the world, that he feels anxious to "depart and to be with Christ;" but that Saviour who saved him, has work for him to do on earth; he must go and tell his friends and neighbours what great things the Lord hath done for him: he must try and be of use to them in the concerns of their souls: his life must preach as well as his lips, that others may be won by his holy and consistent conduct.

Immediately after the cure of this person, our Lord returned to the other side of the lake, to display fresh instances of his Almighty love and power. There came to him a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue; he had but one only daughter, who lay at death's door, and for her he entreats that the Saviour might go and heal her. His request is granted—Jesus sets out for his house; but as the faith of Jairus was so soon to be tried, by hearing of his daughter's death, it was also to be strengthened by witnessing an extraordinary miracle by the way. There was a poor woman who laboured under an issue of blood—a disease that had not more pain than shame, nor more natural infirmity than legal impurity. Time added to her grief: twelve long years had she languished under this woeful complaint; besides, poverty was added to her sickness: "she had spent all her living upon physicians." Could the physicians have even given her ease, though not a cure, then had her money not been misapplied—but she suffered many things from them. Could she have purchased health, even at the expense of cost and pain, it had been well; but, alas! her estate was the worse—her body not the better: her money was wasted, but not her disease; what a lamentable case was her's! We are all afflicted with a worse disease, sin; it is incurable by human art; we may try the various remedies which ignorant man proposes, but after all, like this poor woman, we shall grow worse instead of better—sin will be still uncured, and its sting will wound our conscience. Let us follow her example: when all failed she came to Jesus, and had she gone to him sooner, her money and her pain had been spared.

Doubtless there was weakness in the faith of this woman; the shame of her disease stopped her mouth from any verbal suit; she tried to steal a cure, and came behind the Saviour to touch the hem of his garment—she did so, and was made whole. Who would not think that a person might take a cup of water out of

the sea, unmissed? yet this fearful soul could not steal one drop of mercy from this bottomless sea of divine bounty, without its being felt and questioned; "Jesus said, who touched me?" But why should the Saviour ask who touched him, while the crowd was pressing around? These people thronged him—one only *touched* him; he considered not *their's* as a touch, since faith was wanting. She only was said to touch him, who believed, and expected to receive virtue from him. Just so among ourselves: we may go with the multitude to the house of God, but without that faith which appropriates the Saviour's merits to ourselves, we press in vain. The woman trembles at this discovery, but though Jesus spoke with sternness, it was only to set off the sweetness of his parting words—"Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace." What a pattern of powerful faith had we lost, if Jesus had not called this action into light; the woman also might have been an unthankful receiver of so great a benefit. She now departs in peace—health of body, and peace of conscience. May we seek the pardon of our sins, as she did the cure of her body, by an application to Jesus: then shall we have a peace which the world can neither give, nor take away.

The chapter closes with an account of our Lord's raising to life the daughter of Jairus, who had died ere he reached the house. He is "the resurrection and the life." Let us rejoice that he is able to quicken our dead souls now, as he shall hereafter raise our dead bodies from the grave.

NOTE.—Bishop Hall says, beautifully, on v. 44. "O Saviour, my soul is sick and foul enough with the impurities of sin; let me, by the hand of faith, lay hold but upon the hem of thy garment, (thy righteousness is the garment) it shall be both clean and whole."—See his Contemplations, b. iv. c. vii.

CHAP. IX. 1—27.

CHRIST SENDETH HIS APOSTLES TO WORK MIRACLES, AND TO PREACH—HEROD DESIRED TO SEE JESUS—FIVE THOUSAND MIRACULOUSLY FED—ON CONFESSING CHRIST, AND TAKING UP THE CROSS.

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for *your* journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet, for a testimony against them. And

they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where. Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some that John was risen from the dead; And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him. And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And the people, when they knew *it*, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people. (For they were about five thousand men.) And he said to his disciples, Make them to sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes; and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets. And it came to pass as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some *say*, Elias; and others *say*, That one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And he straitly charged them, and commanded *them* to tell no man that thing: Saying, the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. And he said unto *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Father's, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God.

We were informed in the sixth chapter of this Gospel, that our Lord chose twelve Apostles, whom, after training in the work of their office, he now sends forth to preach the Gospel through Judea. Should we not be thankful that their commission, at first so circumscribed, was afterwards enlarged, and that they were commanded to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,"*—a commission which has been mercifully preserved and extended by a succession of duly ordained

* Mark xvi. 15.

ministers—otherwise, how should the glad tidings of a Saviour have ever reached us? But let us inquire of what benefit has the Gospel been to us? Have we only received from it the name of Christian?—if so, our condemnation will be greater than theirs who never heard it. It is intended to influence our hearts, and lives, and till then, we hear it in vain.

The conduct of Herod displays the power of a guilty conscience; it disturbs the peace and serenity of the mind, and fills it with fearful apprehensions. Herod had murdered John the Baptist, and was now afraid that his spirit would haunt him.* Among the various reports, it was said by some that John was risen from the dead, and for that reason, the guilty and self-accused Herod was anxious to see Jesus, to satisfy his curiosity. Had he gone to see him *now*, a happy change might have been wrought in him, by witnessing the miracles, and listening to the preaching of Jesus; but he suppressed the strivings of conscience, and afterwards, when he did see Jesus, "he with his men of war set him at naught." † Little do they imagine to what lengths of rebellion they may go, who silence the voice of conscience.

After a short absence, the apostles returned to report their progres,s and, for the sake of quietude, our Lord retired with them to a desert place; but what flocking was there after Jesus wherever he went: no sooner had he gone, than multitudes follow him, and so far from being annoyed at the interruption, he at once yielded to their wishes, "He spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing." That our Saviour might approve himself every way beneficent, he now provides for their temporal wants: their zeal for instruction made them forgetful of providing food: and we may observe, concerning ourselves, that the more our minds are occupied about heavenly things, the less anxiety shall we feel about our bodily wants. The disciples having observed the diligent attendance of the multitude, now towards evening came to their Master, desirous that they should be fed and dismissed; and our Lord's reply was, "Give ye them to eat." Sometimes it pleases the Lord to require of us what we are not able to perform, that we may be humbled by seeing that we cannot do it, and that we may be raised to a dependence on him who can do it for us: as when the mother bids her infant walk, though yet unable, intending all the while to afford assistance, the moment it cries

* This refers to Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, mentioned in Matt. ii. 1.—See Horne's Introduction, vol. iii. p. 98. † Chap. xxiii. 11.

for relief. God desires us, weak creatures, to keep his royal law —alas! what can we sinners do? there is no one letter of those ten precepts which we are able to keep by our own power and strength; this command, then, whilst it points out our duty, proves our weakness. But God's commands are not like those of the Egyptian taskmasters, requiring the brick and not giving the straw: if we feel our impotence, and sinfulness, and cry to him for relief, he will teach us to love his law, and dispose us to choose those ways which our worldly hearts are inclined to refuse. In this way our Lord obtained from the apostles what he wanted, namely—an acknowledgment of their insufficiency. They say, "we have no more but five loaves and two fishes:" a poor provision for the Lord of the whole earth, to entertain his household, and so great a multitude. Well does Jesus pour contempt on the costly meals of the men of this world, and of too many amongst those who are Christians. Our bodies should be fed, not pampered: the end of food is to sustain nature, meat was ordained for the body—the body for the soul—and all for God: to rest in the pleasure of eating may befit those creatures which have no souls. If we have "*food* and raiment, let us be therewith content."

The multitude are now desired to sit down: they obey, and expect—O marvellous faith! so many thousands sit down at the Saviour's command, and prepare for a meal, when they saw nothing but five poor barley-loaves, and two small fishes. It is the part of Christ's followers to lead a life of faith, and even when means appear not—to wait upon that merciful hand. Nothing is more easy than to trust God when our barns and stores are full, and to say, "Give us this day our daily bread," when we have it at hand; but when we have nothing, and know not how or whence to get any thing, *then* to depend on an invisible bounty, that is real, lively faith. We are at a loss whether most to admire the miraculous feeding—they all ate, and were filled—about five thousand men—or the quantity that remained, twelve baskets full of fragments, according to the number of his chosen apostles. Those that follow the Lord Jesus shall not want, even in a desert. In him all fulness dwells, and this miracle is placed on record to quell the fears of his believing people. Shall the Israelites be fed with manna? Elijah by the ravens? The widow by her multiplied meal and oil? Christ's followers in the wilderness with loaves and fishes? And can he forget the spiritual wants of his children?

far be this from him. "They who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good." *

When the multitude had retired, our blessed Lord, as the head of a family, gave his disciples an example of family prayer, and then entered into conversation with them upon the general opinion which prevailed respecting him. Peter, in the name of the others, confessed him to be the Christ of God, upon which our Lord took occasion to remind them that they should be put to the trial, whether they were sincere in their profession; that the mere name of being his followers would avail nothing, unless they were ready to take up their cross and suffer for him. If the fear of persecution, mockery, or death, could induce them to be ashamed of him, they were not worthy to be called his disciples.

What was said to them, belongs also to us. What do we think of Christ? Is he a Saviour worth suffering for? Are we his disciples indeed? What motives induce us to assume that character? Are we ready to give up every thing that stands in competition with him, that he may be our "all in all?" Let us anticipate the season when he shall come in the glory of his Father, and let us recollect that we should make but a wretched bargain, were we to lose our souls at last, for *all* that this world can offer us in exchange.

CHAP. XI. 28—62.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST—HE HEALS A CHILD POSSESSED OF AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT—COMMENDETH HUMILITY—FORBIDS REVENGE TOWARDS THE SAMARITANS—FOLLOWING CHRIST SET FORTH.

And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was* white *and* glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias; Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was

* Psalm xxxiv. 10.

found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen. And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child: And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again; and, bruising him, hardly departeth from him. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not. And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation! how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare *him*. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying. Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great. And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid *him* not: for he that is not against us is for us. And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples, James and John, saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save *them*. And they went to another village. And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

THE transfiguration of Christ was one of those events in the history of his life which peculiarly declared him to be God. As man, he appeared "in the form of a servant," but now he was pleased to give a glimpse of his glory; and those three disciples who were afterwards to suffer most for his sake, were permitted to witness it. The last words in the preceding part of this

chapter, conveyed the declaration of Christ, that there were some standing by, who should not taste death till they saw the kingdom of God. Peter, James, and John, were these some: they tasted not of death, till they saw the royalty of Christ glorified, —a foretaste and pledge of that glory which he shall have in his future kingdom.

The time of this event is remarkable. Matthew and Mark say it took place six days *after* he gave the promise of it; St. Luke says, about eight days: the difference may easily be reconciled by the different manner of computation, in the reckoning of nights and days. We may reasonably conjecture that it occurred on the *seventh* day, the Sabbath; why else should it be so precisely mentioned, "after six days," and "about eight," but to imply *that* day which was betwixt the sixth and eighth. God teaches both by words and actions, that the Sabbath of the world shall be at Christ's glorious appearance, and at the transfiguration of his believing people, "quick and dead," with him; both being represented by his attendants—Elijah, who never died—Moses who had died—yet both accompanied him at this solemn season.* Our Lord took three disciples with him: a legal number of witnesses; and they went up into a mount to pray. What should we dare to do without prayer, when he that was God would do nothing without it?

Let us now gaze on the scene which was presented. Jesus appears in glory: that face which was often covered with shame, and contempt, and spitting, now shines so that mortal eyes could not behold it. How shall sinners tremble when Jesus appears in his glory! How shall they wonder, who could see no form and comeliness in him! Let us pray that we may admire him now by faith, and see the excellency of his redeeming love. Yet with all this glory around, the disciples fall asleep: sad emblem of frail humanity! when they do awake, Peter exclaims, "Lord, it is good for us to be here:" so far he was right, but when he wished to make *three tabernacles*, for Christ and his attendants, he spoke ignorantly. These things were only the miniature of glory—an outbreaking of the Sun of Righteousness, but not the full, abiding splendour of the perfect day. If then Peter could not set up these tabernacles on the Mount, how much less should we do so on earth, where there is nothing to fill the desires of a heaven-born soul. May we have

* See another reason for these attendants being selected, in the Comments on Matt. xvii.

such a taste for heavenly things, that nothing below shall satisfy us.

After the eyes of the disciples had been dazzled with the glory, a cloud succeeds and shades them; and from that cloud a voice issues, proclaiming Jesus to be the beloved Son of the Father. How gladly does Peter afterwards recount this as a conclusive testimony for the divinity of Jesus, when he declares, that he heard the voice, and was an eye-witness of his majesty.* Moses and Elias are now gone, only Christ is left; the glory of the law and the prophets was but temporary, that Christ might remain conspicuous: they came but to give testimony to Jesus —when that was done, they vanished. If Christ be with us, it matters not who departs. Oh let us make him ours by faith, and we shall live above the world.

The disciples manifest the weakness of the creature in two other examples here recorded. They wanted faith in the divine power, when called on to cast out an unclean spirit, and therefore Jesus rebuked them, and graciously interfered for the deliverance of the sufferer. The disciples also showed much pride of heart in an unholy emulation for superiority—Jesus knew the *thoughts* of their hearts and reproved them. He set a child before them, an emblem of that unassuming, docile disposition, which they then so much wanted, and which we also want. This too is the gift of God: let us pray for it.

The time now drew near, when Jesus must finish his work, and be received up on high; and although he knew the trials and sufferings which awaited him, "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." † The way from Galilee to Judea lay through the region of Samaria, and as the followers of Christ had now considerably increased, it became necessary that some preparation should be made for them at those places which they intended to visit. Accordingly, messengers were sent before them; but the enmity of the Samaritans against the Jews was so great, that the mere circumstance of their being on the way to Jerusalem was enough to prevent their obtaining leave to pass through. It is not more strange to hear the Son of God ask for a lodging, than to hear him refused. Upon so churlish a denial, two of the disciples were enraged, and with more zeal

* 2 Peter i. 16, 17.

† τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐστήριξε literally, he hardened his face. The nearer our Lord approached to the ignominious cross, the more decidedly he set his face towards Jerusalem, not going any more from city to city, except as they lay in his course to the ungrateful city: what love was this!

than prudence, exclaimed, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and destroy them?" Had they been thus zealous in some charitable cause, the fault had been less, but their zeal was for the purpose of cruelty and private revenge. How quickly does Satan furnish them with a pretence. They quote the example of Elias. If *he* did so, why may not *we*? Elijah was warranted in doing so, and was no doubt specially directed to call down fire from heaven.* But not so the disciples. If any were to revenge the conduct of the Samaritans, it should have been our Lord; but did he wish to injure them? No, he never injured any person. How kind and favourable, even to his enemies! Though reviled, persecuted, scourged, crucified, he injured none: yea, when one of his enemies lost but an ear in an evil quarrel, he healed that ear for him, who came to take away his life.

Three persons of very different character are now accosted by our Lord: two of them have already been noticed,† the one too hasty in promising—the other too slow in performing;—the third was inclined to cast a longing look upon the world he had left behind, and asked permission to return and bid farewell to his family. Our Lord either knew that his family would oppose his following him, and that his going to them would expose him to a greater trial than he was able to bear, or, from *his wish* to return, he intended to show that we should never confer with flesh and blood, and that if we would be his true disciples we must be ready to leave father and mother, husband or wife, if they impede our progress towards the kingdom of God. We know that when a person is ploughing, he keeps his eye fixed on some object before him, by which he is guided; but if he allows his eye to wander from the mark, and looks behind, or on either side, his furrows become crooked and his work is spoiled. Just so the Christian; he has a mark set before him—he must be continually "looking unto Jesus," and if the eye of faith wanders from this object, he will inevitably suffer loss. "Looking back," leads to "drawing back," and drawing back, to perdition. May we not be of the number of those "who draw back to perdition," but of those who "believe to the saving of the soul." ‡

* See 2 Kings i. 10. † See Matt. viii. 19.
‡ Heb. x. 39.

CHAP. X. 1—24.

THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTY DISCIPLES—THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S MINISTERS—THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HEARERS—CHRIST'S JOY AT THE CONVERSION OF SOULS.

After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace *be* to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and *he* to whom the Son will reveal *him*. And he turned him unto *his* disciples, and said privately, Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard *them*.

THE twelve apostles have already gone forth with Christ's com-

mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel previous to their general embassy to the nations of the earth; * and now he selects seventy other disciples to go before his face and prepare the way for him in his journey to Jerusalem; these also he sent out two and two, that they might strengthen each other's hands, and to them he gave instructions similar to those which he gave to the apostles.† They were directed first to begin with prayer to the great Lord of the harvest, that he might give the divine blessing upon their labours, and might increase the number of faithful, skilful, and laborious teachers of the Gospel. Blessed be God, who has answered this prayer in our days, and that there are now gone forth to the harvest, many fit labourers, who enter the sacred office, not for the love of gain, but for the love of souls, and who esteem it their pleasure and their privilege to preach the Gospel of Jesus. Still there are more required; the fields are white, inviting the reaper's attention; let *us* pray "the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers."

Our Lord tells the seventy disciples that they are going as lambs among wolves, in the face of furious adversaries, who would endeavour to harass and destroy them, but that they must commit themselves to the care of their heavenly Father, and that they must act like men in haste, who are despatched upon urgent business and lose no time in vain compliments. These instructions are suited to ministers of the Gospel, even now; and as far as a minister wishes to resemble an Apostle of Jesus, in devotedness and decision, so far will he be guided by these rules. His employment has more difficulty and excellency, than is usually imagined; he is to act as an ambassador for the greatest of kings, and upon no mean employment—that great treaty of peace and reconciliation between God and man, by Jesus Christ.‡ This, surely, is urgent business; here is no time for loitering, or vain worldly occupation. The Christian minister should support, by his character, the dignity of HIM whom he represents; and so far as he conforms to the world, and its ways, so much does he lower the standard of the Gospel —injure his own character as a minister, and lessen his usefulness.

* Compare Matt. x. 5, 6, with Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

† Our Lord selected *twelve* apostles, probably in reference to the twelve tribes; and *seventy* evangelists, because the Sanhedrim or great Jewish council was composed of that number; thus shewing that their authority was henceforth set aside. The Vulgate gives *seventy-two* as the number of the disciples, supposing this to be the number of the Sanhedrim. Lightfoot shews this to be a mistake St. Luke is generally supposed to be one of the seventy.

‡ See 2 Cor. v. 20.

But if there be a difficulty on his part who ministers, there is also responsibility on their's who hear. The Lord denounced an awful curse upon those who despised the message of the seventy disciples, and the very dust of the city which adhered to the feet of the disciples, was to be shaken off, in token of the utter abhorrence in which the Lord held them. Our advantages are even greater than their's and yet multitudes in our day hear the Gospel, and are totally unmoved by it; some scoff at it as folly and enthusiasm; others rest in a mere formal profession of it, without any experience of its renewing and sanctifying power. The preaching of the gospel is intended to influence our hearts and lives, by turning us from carelessness to earnestness, from indolence to exertion, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from sin to holiness, and until this is effected, we have read and heard in vain. And must we not warn such persons? Could we behold the present state of those who once inhabited Sodom and Gomorrah; could we see their weeping, their wailing, their gnashing of teeth, how would our bowels yearn over them! Yet grievous as their condition is, it is more tolerable than that which is prepared for those who neglect the message of the Gospel. Can we then cease to be moved with pity towards the thoughtless world? Suppose them enjoying all that earth can give, yet with such woe overhanging them, they cannot be considered happy. The ridicule and contempt poured on Noah whilst building the ark, did not at all affect the truth of his warnings; the flood came precisely as he foretold, and swept away all the inhabitants of the earth: and so it will be hereafter; the Gospel will prove true, and its threatenings will be executed "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." The amount of our privileges will also increase our condemnation, if we trifle with them. Why was Chorazin and Bethsaida more guilty than Tyre and Sydon? because they enjoyed the personal ministry of the Son of God, which the latter did not. We are living under the dispensation of the Spirit—woe unto us if we reject the testimony of the Spirit, given as it is by the word and by the ministers of Christ. It would be more tolerable even for Capernaum than for us, in the day of judgment, if we die ignorant and unconverted.

After a short time the seventy disciples returned, and as they seemed more pleased with their success in expelling the devils, than in the triumph of the gospel over the power of Satan, our Lord gently rebuked them by saying, that the power of working miracles in his name, should not be a matter of so much

congratulation, as that their names were written in the Lamb's book of life. In the account of the last judgment, it is said that "whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire." * Can there be a more important question for each of us to ask ourselves than this—has *my* name been written in the book of life? It is a similar question with one we all ought to be able to answer; Are we children of God in truth? Are we Christians in reality as well as in name? We cannot, indeed, mount up to heaven, and read our names in the decrees of God's love, and then take comfort that we shall be called, pardoned, and sanctified. This would be to begin at the wrong end—we must fly to the open book of redemption, and there read and believe the promises of mercy to guilty man. Our hearts and lives will be duly affected by such views of divine grace. We shall love him who *first* loved us, and thus we may trace our names to the book of life, and feel assured that the Lord has loved us with everlasting love, and with loving kindness drawn us to himself. What a joyful discovery is this! —what cause of thanksgiving to all who really enter into it. But if conscience testifies that you are not a child of God at present, will you be content to remain in that state? can you sleep at ease this night while you are conscious that if death overtake you before the morning, you cannot be saved? Oh, rise from the sleep of sin, and pray to God, for Christ's sake, to bestow on you the gift of his Holy Spirit; to make you a new creature, that it may be evident to yourself, and to all around, that you are one of those whose names are written in the book of life. Let not your station in life, if low, be a bar to your seeking these blessings. Human learning is to be attained by study; but the knowledge of the Bible, and of true religion, is to be gained by prayer. Neither rich nor poor can know any thing, unless the Lord Jesus reveal it by his Spirit, and that Spirit is offered freely to all who ask it. Blessed are they who do ask and obtain it, for they are blessed now in the peace which they possess, and they shall be blessed throughout eternity.

NOTE v. 18.—"I saw Satan fall from heaven." Christ evidently means that by the ministry and miracles of the seventy, Satanic power was diminished;—a pledge, however, of the final overthrow of Satan's power and kingdom. Rom. xvi. 20.

* Rev. xx. 11, 15.

CHAP. X. 25—42.

CHRIST REPLIES TO THE LAWYER'S QUESTION—OUR NEIGHBOUR DESCRIBED—CHRIST REPROVETH MARTHA, AND COMMENDETH MARY.

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him,* and departed, leaving *him* half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him,* and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him,* And went to *him,* and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

By the term "lawyer" in Scripture is meant one who studied the law of Moses, and expounded it to the people. One of them now addressed our blessed Lord; professing some regard for him, he proposed a question for his solution, not with a design of gaining information, but of involving our Lord in a difficulty. The question itself was of the utmost importance—"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and had it been asked in simplicity, it would have been answered directly: but our Lord, knowing his heart, answered it by another question—"What is written in the law, how readest thou?" See here the importance of the

written word of God; we should refer to it for the way of salvation, and treasure up what we read, so that when asked concerning any point of our creed, we may be able to tell what is written in the law, and how we read. This lawyer gave a proper answer. He did not, like a Pharisee, or as many others would do, refer to tradition for an answer—he honestly quoted the written word of God, and fastened upon the two great commandments of the law, as those which he thought should be most strictly observed, in order to obtain eternal life—the love of God—and the love of our neighbour. Our Lord approved of what he said, and commended him, saying, "thou hast answered right." Here then both parties were agreed. But the hardest part of the work yet remained, Jesus adds—"*this do and thou shalt live*," thou shalt inherit eternal life. We all know that the love of God, and the love of our neighbour, form the substance of the ten commandments, and if any one were to keep these holy precepts *perfectly*, from the time of his birth, to the hour of his death, he would thereby be entitled to inherit eternal life; which may explain the emphasis of our Lord's saying, "this *do*, and thou shalt live." Let us then remember that nothing short of *perfect, sinless* obedience will satisfy the holy God, and *that*, for the whole period of our lives, and if we err in a single instance, we lose our title to happiness.* We all *have* sinned, times without number, therefore we never can be saved by our obedience to the law. We must therefore be content to be saved wholly by the righteousness of another, and blessed be God, all that we want is provided in Christ. He has kept the whole law of God, and offers to place his obedience to the account of every one who will be saved solely by him.

But observe the difficulty in which this lawyer was placed: Christ having said, "this do and thou shalt live," he evidently saw that if further questioned whether he *had done* these things, he must confess that he had not, and that he would then be asked how his defects were to be supplied. In order therefore to get out of the difficulty, being anxious to justify himself, he starts another question—"Who is my neighbour?" As to loving God, he was willing to say no more of it, for he felt, probably, conscious of guilt, but as to his neighbour, he was sure that he had come up to the demands of the law, having been very kind and respectful to all about him. How many there are who resemble this lawyer! they are willing to justify themselves be-

* See James ii. 10.

cause they have been kind parents—dutiful children—affectionate husbands or wives—or charitable to the poor. But the duty to God—the loving him with *all* the heart, *all* the mind, and above every thing else in the world, seems forgotten and set aside. There they must plead guilty, and therefore, like the lawyer, they try to overlook that part of the law's demands.

But, though this lawyer was so confident of having observed his duty to his neighbour, our Lord convicts him on this point also. He represents the case of a person who was on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who, falling among thieves, was stripped and wounded and left half-dead. A priest passed by and saw him, but did nothing—a Levite, too, passed on the other side, without offering assistance ; at last a kind Samaritan came, and though less might be expected from one of that sect, than from the other two, who were Jews, yet he gave him every possible relief within his power. The lawyer could not but acknowledge that the last person was neighbour to him who fell among thieves, while both the priest and Levite were guilty of a breach of their duty to their neighbour. Thus the lawyer was informed that every one of every nation, sect, or party, was his neighbour, and that if ever he omitted an opportunity of doing a kindness to a person in distress, he broke the command of God, who desired him to love his neighbour as himself. Let us apply this to ourselves. We have not even observed our duty to our neighbour as we ought, for we have been often guilty of selfishness and unkindness, or shame has prevented our relieving a distressed neighbour. Oh, let us think of the love of Jesus, who came purposely to relieve us in our lost condition. The good Samaritan is a striking emblem of the gracious Saviour, who came to bind up our broken hearts,* to pour his healing balm into our bleeding wounds, and to do for us what the law could not effect. If we have been healed by him, we shall love him ; and if we love him, we shall remember his words—" Go, and do thou likewise."

Our blessed Lord is to be found in every house where he could do good—one while in a Pharisee's—again, in a publican's—here, in the house of Lazarus, who with his sisters, Martha and Mary, dwelt in Bethany. Happy house, into which

* We may thus illustrate the Saviour's love by this and similar cases, but we should not, like Augustine and some of the fathers, run into a minute allegory. Adam, the wounded man—the thieves, satanic beings—twopence, the two precepts of charity—healing and preaching, &c. All this is far-fetched, and certainly not intended by our Lord. See Mayer's excellent summary of the Views of the Ancients, and also Calvin's remarks in his Harmony of the Gospel.

the Son of God vouchsafes to set his foot; happy persons, in whose hearts he takes up his abode! Martha, it seems, being the eldest sister, attended to the duties of housekeeper: Mary was her assistant in the charge: they were sisters in spirit, no less than in flesh. No sooner did Jesus enter than he began to preach; before his bodily repast was ready, he provided spiritual food for his hosts. Both the sisters for a time sat attentively listening; at last Martha's care for our Lord's entertainment carried her to her household concerns—Mary sat still at his feet. Martha cares to feast Jesus—Mary to be feasted by him. Even God's children have different dispositions, some quiet and contemplative, others, active and energetic—the latter, perhaps, are exposed to greater snares—to mistake energy of character for real zeal for God—or to neglect secret fellowship with God for outward labours.

After a while Martha came to our Lord with a complaint of Mary's neglect. "Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" Jesus answered and said unto her, "Martha, Martha, thou art troubled about many things, but one thing is needful." How many trouble and perplex themselves about the things of this life, while they totally overlook the concerns of their souls! Their property, their wants, their situations, fill them with care: they bestow pains upon comparative trifles, and neglect those things which are of eternal moment. Happy they, who, like Mary, choose the "good part." Martha's part was soon done: the thanks and use of a little outward hospitality cannot last long; but Mary's "shall not be taken from her." Oh, the happiness of a frame of mind like Mary's, which makes every thing subservient to the concerns of the soul! May *we* feel the importance of the "one thing needful." May we never allow any thing to be preferred before it; and then we may rest assured that besides the eternal enjoyment of Christ hereafter, we shall, even here, be saved a world of care and annoyances, which so often choke the good seed of God's word, and drown the souls of men in destruction and perdition.

NOTE v. 30.—Jericho was in the days of Christ a great city. Herod had given it a palace and amphitheatre; a large number of priests dwelt there. It was a lonely road and infested with thieves, and is so to this day.

CHAP. XI. 1—26.

CHRIST TEACHETH HOW TO PRAY—CASTETH OUT A DUMB DEVIL—THE STRONG MAN ARMED—AND THE STRONGER.

And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting *him*, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth *it* swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh *to him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first.

Our Lord constantly prayed with his disciples when they retired together, and on one of these occasions he was requested to give a form of prayer, such as John had given to his disciples. With this request our Lord readily complied, and delivered that prayer which we call after his name—"The Lord's Prayer." In St. Matthew's Gospel, as already explained,* it seems to be given as a *model* of prayer—here, rather as a *form*, and should therefore be highly prized by the christian church. Forms of prayer are most useful in their place, and our Lord's example should silence all objections to the use of a liturgy or a precomposed form in the worship of God. Men may indeed abuse this mode of prayer to the support of formality or vain superstition, but what good thing has not the sin of man perverted to the worst purposes? Thus it is to be feared that numbers repeat this prayer daily with their lips, whose hearts do not respond to a single expression in it. This is nothing short of mocking God.

It is a great mercy to be made so sensible of our wants, and of our dependence on God, as heartily to desire to pray. Jesus will then teach us to pray in sincerity, in spirit, and in truth—he will give us "the spirit of adoption" that we may truly address God as "our Father," and he will so shed abroad in our hearts love towards all mankind for his sake, that no angry feelings of resentment shall hinder our enjoyment of God's favour and his answer to our petitions. Our petitions should not be so much for earthly things; we might ask for what would be highly injurious to us, and with this, the experience of every one will agree; for there is scarcely a person to be found who has not lived to see that if *some one thing* which he was most anxious about, and for which perhaps he prayed, had been granted, it would have been a curse, instead of a blessing. Had not God sometimes withheld, in mercy, what we asked, we should have perished at our own request: so ignorant and blind is man of what is for his real advantage. But if our prayers are offered for spiritual things—if we pray for the pardon of sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit, strength to resist temptations, increase of faith, and power to overcome evil habits, as referred to in this comprehensive form—we have the surest promise of success. These things *must* be for our good, and therefore we may freely ask, and confidently expect an answer. We may therefore return, again and again, to the throne of grace, even when we have been proved by de-

* See the Comment on Matt. vi. 9—13.

lays, and renew our earnestness in seeking and knocking; we shall then obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts, and be put in full possession of the salvation of Christ. All these blessings our heavenly Father is far more ready to bestow on *every one* who asks for them, than any indulgent father can be to give good food to his hungry child; and in this way we need no more fear being deluded, than a beloved child needs fear lest his father should "give him a scorpion instead of an egg;" nay, this would be far more likely—there *are* unnatural parents, but God is love, and delighteth in answering the petitions of those who pray, through his Son's intercession, for spiritual blessings.

A miracle is here recorded to have been wrought by our Lord, which equally showed his power, and the malevolence of the Jewish rulers. It was performed on a person who was possessed of a dumb devil; not that the devil was dumb, but the way in which he acted on this poor man was, to make him dumb. All such ejections of satanic power were evidences of Christ's victory over the wicked one—it has been supposed that these bodily possessions were more peculiarly manifest in Christ's time—as if these satanic beings hated human nature in an especial degree, when God was manifest in it for the bruising of the serpent's head. We know, however, that the devil and his angels still harass the believer's soul, and hold the world under the bondage of sin. Thus what numbers are affected in the same way as this man—not altogether without the *use* of speech, but *dumb* upon those subjects which ought to be the chief matter of their conversation,—viz. the things of ETERNITY, and the concerns of their souls. Why do the generality of persons speak so little on these subjects? Is it not because they are possessed by the power of Satan? "When the devil was gone out," we are told, "the dumb spake;" and when the spirit of the devil, which possesses the majority of the world, is removed by the power of Christ, that person loves, and speaks about, heavenly things.

This miracle had a different effect upon those present. The multitude wondered, and were surprised, but the learned Scribes treated it with scorn and blasphemy. They could not deny the miracle, but were obliged to forge a deceit, and to say that it was performed by the agency of Satan: this our Lord proved to be false—by showing that Satan was too wise to help in the destruction of his own kingdom; and thus the cavils of these objectors were like all such in every day, both blasphemous and unreasonable.

Nothing can better set forth Satan's power than the idea of a strong man, well armed, dwelling in his castle, and keeping his goods at peace. Man's heart is that castle, where the wicked one loves to dwell; he aims at keeping all the affections of the heart—the conscience and powers of mind, under his baneful influence. He stupifies the sinner by the love of sin, or lulls him into false security, So that we are not only unable to contend with such an enemy, in a state of nature, but we are *unwilling* to be disturbed in our fatal sleep, or fly from his deceit. Blessed be God that Jesus is the captain of our salvation—far stronger than Satan himself—and by word and deed he overcame him for us. He triumphed over this enemy by the cross, and from time to time, he dislodges Satan from the hearts of his people. One word really applied by the energy of the Spirit can dispossess the usurper, and restore the heart to God. But some only are outwardly reformed, not inwardly sanctified—from these the "unclean spirit" goes out for a time; for various reasons they leave off many sins, but they do not admit the Saviour to take possession of their hearts; and so the enemy returns to his habitation, and the last state of such men is worse than the first. From such an awful state (let each of us say,) "Good Lord, deliver us."

CHAP. XI. 27—54.

CHRIST SHOWETH WHO ARE BLESSED—REFUSETH TO GIVE A SIGN—AND DENOUNCES THE HYPOCRISY AND FORMALITY OF THE PHARISEES.

And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed *is* the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed *are* they that hear the word of God, and keep it. And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here. No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth *it* in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when *thine eye* is evil, thy body also *is* full of darkness. Take heed

therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore *be* full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light. And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw *it*, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. *Ye* fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over *them* are not aware *of them*. Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also. And he said, Woe unto you also, *ye* lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation. Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and Pharisees began to urge *him* vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

We are very apt to esteem persons blessed, or happy, on account of possessing external privileges, without considering that they do not always change the hearts of those to whom they are given. Christ does not deny that his mother had been pronounced blessed, and highly favoured, but he declares her blessing to consist, not so much in having been his mother, as that she was one who had not only heard, but valued the word of God, and rejoiced in him as her Saviour. In this sense, we may share the blessing with her, without having the same honour and privilege; Christ loves them who delight in his word, but we must not be satisfied with merely hearing it; the blessing is only upon those who hear and meditate upon it, and, through grace, become true followers of the Lord Jesus.

The people being surprised at the miracle performed by

Christ, mentioned in the preceding portion of Scripture, ran together in crowds, desiring a sign. Christ, we find, was ever ready to work miracles, to encourage and confirm the faith of honest hearers, but not to satisfy the curiosity of unbelievers. How preposterous of those who had seen so many miracles performed by Christ, to ask still for a sign of his being the Messiah! Jesus seeing their hardness of heart, and unwillingness to believe, declared that no other sort of attestation should be granted, till his own resurrection, which, he foretold, would happen on the third day from his death, according to its typical resemblance in Jonah's miraculous deliverance.* He reproved them for their obstinate impenitence and unbelief; and threatened them with severe punishments. The Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but *they* had despised a far greater prophet than he was: and in the same manner he also referred them to the Queen of Sheba,† and warned them that her example would condemn their perverseness, because they had far greater opportunities in hearing one who spake as never man did, and was in all respects greater than Solomon.

Are we then satisfied with the proofs brought in favour of the Gospel? Nothing indeed but a proud disposition can lead us to deny their sufficiency. "Light is come into the world," and if our eyes do not discern its excellency, the reason is, "we love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil," and our final condemnation will be more severe, in proportion to the brighter light we enjoy. But if the mind be clearly enlightened by the word and Spirit of God, the light will, like the clear shining of a candle in a dark room, shed and spread its light into all the powers and faculties of the soul, and will be displayed in every action of the life, and also will communicate light for the benefit of others. The only way to make a right use of our advantages, is to possess the *single eye*—which looks not to many objects in a confused way, but fixes its gaze on the Lord Jesus, the source of light, and conveys illumination to the soul; hence arise holy motives and a pure conscience; but if our apprehension of Christ be clouded—the heart is hardened, and the whole man alienated from God.

Lord, withdraw not the Gospel of thy grace, nor the blessed influence of thy Spirit from us! fix thine abode in our hearts; cause thy truth to shine there, giving us "the light of the knowledge of thy glory in the face of Jesus Christ."

* See Jonah i. 17. † 1 Kings x. 1.

Our Lord throughout the remainder of this chapter, describes very forcibly, the heartless, cold, and empty profession of religion with which the proud self-righteous Pharisees were satisfied, and in the capacity of their judge, he pronounced upon them the heaviest condemnation. We hear, in awful and prophetic repetition, the word of warning and denunciation breaking forth from his lips. What solemn things are these! let us not then pass them over carelessly, but let us endeavour to apply them to ourselves, for whom they were written as well as for the Pharisees of old, and may they make a deep impression upon our hearts. Some of us, perhaps, are ready to say,—how can the Pharisee's case in the least apply to us, as we have but few ceremonies belonging to the religion we profess? This may indeed be the case, and yet we may resemble the Pharisees in *heart*, by looking to something in ourselves, to save us—our moral lives—our charity—our freedom from gross sin—our regular attendance on stated duties and places of worship. If to ourselves and our works we look for salvation, either in part or in whole, and see not our need of Christ's precious blood, as that which can *alone* cleanse us from sin—we have reason to tremble, for the woes pronounced upon the Pharisees by Christ, do equally apply to our case as well as theirs. Let us ask our hearts, is there not some mixture of sin in our very best actions?—something to be ashamed of in all our prayers?—something to be repented of in all we do? How then could we offer an impure action to a holy God? Let us then beware, how we put any thing of our own to what Jesus has done. His work is a finished work; he will save none but those who depend on him *wholly*. When we come to Christ as our Saviour, we must leave behind us our own fancied righteousness and duties, and bring nothing but our sins, wants, and miseries. Christ must be "all in all," or he will be nothing.

The last woe denounced by our Lord in this chapter against the Scribes and Pharisees, is for sealing up the Holy Scriptures. The written word of God is "the key of knowledge," whereby an entrance into heaven is opened to men, by revealing Jesus who is "the way, the truth, and the life." Great, therefore, is the guilt of those who hinder men from reading the scriptures, and from coming to the true knowledge of the will of God, revealed, not for one class of men, but for *all*. The Scribes and Pharisees, full of anger at all that Christ had said, put to him many artful questions, hoping to provoke him to drop some unguarded expression which might be turned to his disadvantage,

and prejudice the people against him. Lord; preserve us from taking offence where thy word convinces us of our sinfulness; may thy grace rather lead us to see our sins, and to pray for thy pardoning mercy, through Christ our Lord!

CHAP. XII. 1—31.

CHRIST ENJOINETH FAITHFULNESS IN CONFESSING HIM—WARNETH AGAINST COVETOUSNESS AND OVER-CAREFULNESS ABOUT EARTHLY THINGS.

In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light: and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say, And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn: and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the

fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

It is impossible to find a greater instance of faithfulness, than the conduct of our Lord here presents to us. He had been invited to the house of a Pharisee, and even while in his house he boldly censured the whole sect of the Pharisees, as we have already seen in the last chapter. This might have been thought by some to be a breach of hospitality, but a sense of his duty was paramount to every other consideration. His reproofs, as might be expected, greatly irritated his hearers; yet no sooner had an immense crowd assembled at the door, than he went out, and in the presence of them all, he enjoined his disciples to beware of the hypocrisy which prevailed among the Pharisees. Oh, that the ministers of the Gospel were more alive to the value of immortal souls, and then they would be less inclined to compromise their duty for fear of giving offence! Men may be offended if we do speak—God will be offended if we do not. Christians of all classes are too much swayed by the fear of man. Scarcely does any one begin to feel a concern about his soul, than he is beset by this temptation. He may sometimes fear to join the people of God, though he knows they are the happiest, lest he be branded with their scornful name. His friends, perhaps, threaten to disown him, or his patron to turn his back upon him; and then, to avoid the cross, he may be tempted to sacrifice conscience. Surely, "the fear of man bringeth a snare." But if you are a Christian, who are tempted to yield to this evil suggestion, and to deny your Master through fear of the cross, pray for strength to shake it off. "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker." * Fear *them* not, therefore, who can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but fear *him*, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Be bold then to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

* Isaiah li. 12, 13.

If you be a Christian, you have no need to be over-anxious: for that God who takes care of the sparrows, will much more take care of you. Your very hairs are numbered, much more are your sighs—your tears—your losses. Your Father knows your every want, and no greater heat will he allow to the furnace, than he will give you strength to bear. Let it be known that you glory in the name of Christian, or saint, though they be terms of reproach. Confess Christ with your lips—confess him in your life, and let your conduct carry reproof to all who live ungodly, and will not have the Lord Jesus to reign over them.*

A person who had been listening to our Lord during his address to his disciples, apprehending, that as he spoke with such authority, he could easily prevail to settle a dispute between his brother and himself, requested his interference, saying, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." But our Lord seeing that he was more intent on his temporal, than on his spiritual advancement, not only declined the office, but took occasion, from his example, to warn his disciples against covetousness. He spoke a parable to them, in which he represents a rich man, who after amassing a good deal of wealth, sat down at his ease, promising himself the enjoyment of his beloved treasures. What a faithful picture is this of many around us! The rich man is not said to have used any unjust means to increase his estate; his fault lies in his over-anxious desire after money, and his determination of spending it on selfish and sensual gratification. Alas! how many resemble this wretched man! they have no proper sense of the instability of human affairs—the uncertainty of life—the vanity of earthly enjoyments—the worth of their souls, or the importance of eternity—but seem to consider that "eating, drinking, and being merry," is to constitute the great business of life. Observe the brand of infamy which our Lord fastens on this man—"Thou fool!"—and listen to the awakening voice which speaks to him: "this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Many of us who are now in health and strength, and in the enjoyment of this world's goods, are, perhaps, planning schemes for the future, even for years to come. Pause and consider, that you have no lease of your lives. Nothing can stop the arm of death, when once he has received the commission to strike the blow; and then what will avail your money, your schemes, your

* For remarks on the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, see the Comments on Matt. xii. 22—32.

amusements? Will they take from death its sting? no, they will add considerably to it. Be wise now, and seek that which will give peace at the last.

If we desire temporal things, *for themselves*, or in an *undue degree*, we fall under the Lord's sharp rebuke. All beyond mere food and raiment is an empty bubble. To invest earthly things with any inherent excellency, is to put them in the place of God, and to make idols of them; and if our thoughts run after them, more than after God and heavenly things—what is this but idolatry? True religion is far from inculcating a neglect of our proper lawful calling in life, but it gives us a principle which raises us above losses and disappointments; it presents us with a view of God, as our God, and shows us that nothing in this world can either add to or take from our happiness, if we are reconciled to God through the blood of his Son. Our happiness should be independent of all earthly things; we should have a principle within us which could enable us to be just as happy if all our earthly goods were taken from us, as when in the possession of them.

Every one has some cloak wherewith to cover his sin. One says, "I only desire a competency;" but a competency in God's estimation, may be a very different thing from what it is in ours. We may be desiring something unpossessed, when God says, "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." Another says, "I care not for myself, but only for my family, and I ought to provide for them." But we must no more covet an earthly portion for them, than for ourselves; the welfare of their souls should be our chief concern. Let us all "seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"—let us seek an interest in the Lord Jesus, and to have our hearts renewed by his Holy Spirit. Then shall we be independent of the world. If rich, we shall not waste our master's goods on self, or vanity; if poor, we shall not be covetous, nor distrust God. We may be sure that he who has clothed the flowers with such beauty as to throw the splendour of a Solomon into the shade, will not deny us necessary clothing; that he who daily feeds the feathered tribe, will provide daily food for us. With a sense of gratitude for his redeeming love and fatherly protection, and with his peace reigning in our hearts, we may say, "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be

no herd in the stalls; yet, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."*

NOTE on v. 17.—"I will pull down my barns," &c. Ambrose well says, "You have storehouses already, viz. the bosoms of the poor, the houses of the widows, and the mouths of infants."

CHAP. XII. 32—59.

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS A LITTLE FLOCK—TO BE PREPARED FOR THE LORD'S SECOND COMING—THE CARELESSNESS OF THE WORLD—WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED—WHY THE GOSPEL IS OPPOSED.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and *your* lights burning: And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed *are* those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season? Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But, and if that servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two

* Hab. iii. 17, 18.

against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when *ye see* the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. *Ye* hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, *as thou art* in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him: lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.

It is a solemn reflection, and no less melancholy than true, that out of the multitude who profess the religion of Jesus, there are but very few who are real Christians, and who shall sit down with Christ in his future kingdom of glory. Christ has said, "narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and *few* there be that find it:" and here again he designates his people as a "little flock." Happy, happy are we if we are among the sheep of his fold—if we have been "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise," and bear the stamp of holiness which is the characteristic of his believing people. We need not then fear any thing; "all things shall work together for our good:" it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom; let us then withdraw our affections from all earthly concerns, and as Jesus, the only real treasure, is in heaven, let our hearts and conversation be there continually also. Woe unto those who are only called after the name of Christ, without being renewed after his image in the spirit of their minds. We must be made Christ's sheep here, or we can never enter his heavenly fold hereafter.

Our Lord, in enforcing the prospect of his second coming, compares himself to a master leaving his house, and appointing his servants their work, and commanding his porter to watch, in order to admit him without delay, at whatever moment he should return. The precise period of his return is unknown to us—the signs he has given us will, indeed, give notice of its near approach; these may arise in our day, even as the Lord may return to his Church in our generation; hence we all should be found waiting for Christ, that "when he knocks, we may open to him *immediately*. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."* How vigilant should we

* On v. 35.—"Let your loins be girded:" Trapp well says, "It signifies,

be if we knew that our house and property would be attacked this night; how vigilant if we even apprehended it; and shall we be less watchful in the concerns of eternity? Our utmost efforts cannot delay the coming of the great judge, neither would the Christian wish to put it far away, if he could; he rather desires to be prepared for that blessed day, and to rejoice in its approach. Ye, brethren, "are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief;" "therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." *

What a painful sight is it to look around upon the thoughtless world! The majority live as if death would be the end of their existence; as if there was to be no hereafter; as if self-gratification was the one thing needful; and as if the care of the soul was a matter quite unworthy the attention of an intelligent mind. What horror awaits such persons when death shall break the spell, and disclose the realities of eternity! Who can paint the consternation of a thoughtless wordling, whose spirit has been suddenly called into the unseen world, and who has been convinced when too late, that the concerns of his soul should have occupied his chief attention, and that the highest point of worldly interest should have been esteemed comparatively worthless. Are not numbers now like the wicked servant described in this chapter? They seem to delight in the thought that "the Lord delayeth his coming," and give themselves up to folly, pleasure, and worldly gratification. Too many also disturb the household by their vain contentions and wilful divisions, instead of being actively employed for the great Master, and usefully engaged for their fellow servants, as members of the church. To all who continue in their sins, or encourage false doctrine, heresy, and schism, the Lord will arise in terrible judgment, and appoint them their portion with his outcast enemies! May none of us experience his terrible wrath in the day of vengeance.

No man is left in such absolute ignorance (except by his own fault) as not to do many things which he knows to be wrong; and to neglect many things which he knows to be right; therefore even the nations who have not had God's revelation are inexcusable, because they have not lived up to the light they possessed,† and are liable to condemnation and punishment if they persist in disobedience. But in proportion to the degree

1. Readiness. 2. Nimbleness, handiness, and handsomeness. A loose, discinct and diffluent mind is unfit to serve God."

* 1 Thess. v. 4, 6. † See Rom. i. 18—25.

in which nations and individuals have the means of instruction, and are actually acquainted with his revealed will, their disobedience becomes more aggravated, and their punishment will be proportionably more severe. How heavy then shall be the punishment of our land, if the advantages which raise us above other nations, be not duly applied; how heavy will be *our* individual punishment, if with the gospel daily set before us, and the free promise of the Spirit offered, we be not found among the people of God!

Our Lord declares that the introduction of the gospel would resemble the kindling of a fire which should occasion a wide-spreading conflagration. Not that this is the tendency of Christianity, which is pure, peaceable, and loving; but it is caused by the opposition which exists in the hearts of men to every thing like practical religion; hence the opposition which some members of a family receive from their friends, because religion has found its way to their hearts, and has shown itself in their lives, whilst others are living without God in the world. This is the real cause of all opposition to the gospel, because it will not allow men to remain in sin. God has declared that they who live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution, and it ought rather to be a cause of rejoicing when the ungodly avoid our company; for then we have reason to hope that God has made us to differ from them, and that he will protect us in every difficulty and danger.

CHAP. XIII. 1—17.

CHRIST PREACHETH REPENTANCE—THE FRUITLESS FIG-TREE—A WOMAN HEALED OF HER LONG INFIRMITY.

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus, answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. He spake also this parable; A certain *man* had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung *it:* And if it bear fruit, *well:* and if not, *then* after that thou shalt

cut it down. And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up *herself*. And when Jesus saw her, he called *her to him*, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid *his* hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath-day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath-day. The Lord then answered him, and said, *Thou* hypocrite! doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or *his* ass from the stall, and lead *him* away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath-day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Some of our Lord's hearers, taking occasion, from what he had just spoken respecting the danger of persons delaying reconciliation with God, till they were hurried, unprepared, into his presence, told him of some Galileans who had met a sudden death, having been slain by Pilate, in the very act of offering their sacrifices, and whose blood had been thereby mingled with their offerings.* But our Lord seeing that they imagined this calamity to be a judgment from God, on account of some enormous wickedness, rectified their error, by telling them that neither they who thus suffered, nor others who were buried under the ruins of a falling tower, were sinners above the rest, but that except they repented, they should all likewise perish. From the use of the word "likewise," some have imagined that our Lord alluded to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred at the time of the passover, when the blood of numbers was actually mingled with their sacrifices, and when multitudes perished by the falling of walls and towers, at that memorable siege. But whether this be true or not, this passage of Scripture has a further application, both to the Jews, and to us. "Except *we* repent, we shall all likewise perish." Repentance literally signifies a change of heart, or mind. All, by nature, have wicked hearts, and all who shall be saved must be renewed in the spirit of their minds. This new heart gives a love for holiness, a hatred of sin, a zeal for the glory of God, a preparation for heaven. Without this we never can see heaven, nor could we enjoy it if we were there. Repentance is the gift of

* This probably refers to the followers of Judas Gaulonitis, who refused paying tribute to Cæsar, and some of whom Pilate slew at one of the great festivals. See Josephus, Antiq. lib. xviii.

God. Have we obtained this change of heart? If not, let us pray for it unceasingly, through the Lord Jesus, for "except we repent, we shall all likewise perish."

To enforce his warning, our Lord spoke a parable, to show the doom of all unfruitful professors of religion. He represents the case of a fig-tree, planted in a vineyard, where it had all the advantages that the care of the vine-dresser could afford. But after all, it yielded no fruit. A sentence of burning is about to be denounced on it, when the vine-dresser intercedes and begs that it might be spared for one year longer. This certainly was primarily intended for the Jews, who, above other nations, enjoyed the fostering care of God, and who were thus warned to be fruitful in proportion to their advantages.* But, much as the Jews enjoyed the distinguishing favour of God, we now enjoy it much more. The visible church of Christ is like a fig-tree planted in a vineyard, and each of us, individually, share the general bounty. We are planted in the vineyard—we have the ordinances of religion—We have the promise of the life-giving streams of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus, the tree of life, is held within our reach. Let us ask what fruits have we produced? May not God say of many of us—behold, these ten, these twenty, or these forty years, I have come seeking fruit on this tree and find none.† And what has stayed the execution of the sentence? the intercession of Jesus. Yet do not calculate on another year to come. His *last* plea in your behalf may have been made *long since*, and the sentence may this night go forth—"cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground." All who do not bring forth the fruits of holiness, are *cumberers* of the ground, and all who remain such shall be burned. No genuine fruit can grow except from a saving faith in the Lord Jesus. This "faith" is not a mere cold assent to certain doctrines,—it is a real confidence in God's faithful promises, by which we lay hold on the atonement of Christ, and are made partakers of his merits. This gift produces gratitude on our part, and gratitude produces love and obedience. Hence, good works are said to be the fruits of faith. Let us recollect that the gift of faith is offered freely to all who ask for it sincerely through Christ.

How easily did our Lord silence the cavils of his enemies.

* See Psalm lxxx. 8, 9, 10.

† "The three years" in which fruit was sought in vain, have been variously interpreted; by Augustine, "before the law, under the law, and under grace." By Theophylact, "Childhood, manhood, old age." It seems rather taken from the age of the fig-tree, when it should have borne. God expects fruit at the proper time, but is long-suffering.

Though this woman was grievously afflicted for eighteen years, they would not have her relieved, because it was the Sabbath, and they pretended, that to work a bodily cure was labour; yet, as our Lord reminded them, they loosed their beasts of burden, and "led them away to watering!" No wonder that Christ's adversaries felt ashamed under such a rebuke: they pretended regard for God's holy day, as a reason for not assuaging the sorrows of this daughter of Abraham, and yet they would not treat their cattle so cruelly, because they knew that loss of property would ensue. Oh! the selfishness of the human heart. How soon did Christ touch this main-spring of human depravity—how does he show us that all cavils against the truth flow from the ungodly propensities of the heart of man. The case of this afflicted woman may also show us, that where there is a mind anxious for instruction, difficulties and hindrances are easily overcome. She was found *in the synagogue*, though so grievously afflicted with weakness that she "could in no wise lift up herself." What a rebuke does her conduct convey to those who, on account of some slight indisposition, or for some trifling reason, make an excuse to absent themselves from the house of God. We have also a fresh proof of the Saviour's love and power, which should lead us to apply to him for spiritual strength. Sin has bowed us down, and we can in no wise lift up ourselves. Jesus alone is able to heal us. He is to be found in the synagogue—in his holy word—and at a throne of grace; and though there are many who will argue for *our ability to raise up ourselves*, let us simply take the word of God as our guide on this subject, and sensible that we are not able to conquer a single evil propensity in our own strength, let us apply to Jesus, to "work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

CHAP. XIII. 18—35.

WE MUST STRIVE TO ENTER THE STRAIT GATE—JESUS WEEPS OVER JERUSALEM.

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? and

he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all *ye* workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you *yourselves* thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and *from* the west, and from the north, and *from* the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the *day* following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until *the time* come when ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

We may often remark that, though our Lord never refused an humble inquirer who came to ask instruction, he never indulged idle curiosity. A certain person seemed influenced by this prying spirit, and asked, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" Jesus, with admirable wisdom, did not give him a direct answer, but whilst he conveyed the information of the fewness of his people, he made a direct appeal to the man's conscience. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." It is for us rather to know *how* we must be saved, than *how many* shall reach heaven. We know, indeed, that it is a "little flock," and they enter by a gate which carnal nature feels to be strait. Vital religion has been well compared to a narrow bridge and a large and deep river, in which case we cannot look to either side without extreme danger.* To each of us our Lord says, "strive *thou* to enter in at the strait gate:" there must be a struggling in prayer; a striving against sin and Satan; a conflict with evil habits and evil tempers, but all in the strength of the Lord. Some strive to enter in and are not able, either because they aim at doing this in a wrong way, or because they set about it too late. At present the door of mercy is open; pardon through the atoning

* Bradford.

blood of Jesus is offered; a new heart by the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit; peace of mind, and a well-founded hope of future glory. But these blessings must be enjoyed *now* or *never*. There is a time coming when many shall strive to enter in, but shall not be able, because they allowed the day of grace to pass unimproved; like the foolish virgins who went to buy oil when the bridegroom had arrived. How many will pray with earnestness when Christ appears in the clouds, who never prayed before!—how many would give worlds (did they possess them) to be numbered among the saints in that day, though now they despise and ridicule them. Prayer will be too late, if only begun then—they may cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," but he shall answer, "I know ye not whence ye are." They may even refer to their former privileges! "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets," as those who dwelt in the cities of Israel where Christ once sojourned, might literally say, and as many who have partaken of the Lord's supper without faith and love, shall yet claim the Lord's attention, but in vain: they did not serve him, whose name they professed, with an undivided heart, and, therefore, he will disown them as his people in those awful words, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." May we seek, strive, and pray now, before the blessings of the Gospel are removed from our reach!

As our Lord was now in Galilee, within Herod's jurisdiction, some of the Pharisees warned him of his danger from that wicked prince, who had already beheaded John; but Jesus directed them to inform him, that he should proceed with his work without regarding him, that he must continue to work miracles for a very short time longer, as it were, "that day, and the morrow," and then, as on the third day, he should be perfected by his sufferings, which would complete his work on earth.* Nevertheless, though his time was short, that he must needs go openly from place to place, while it lasted, and though he certainly should soon be put to death, yet that would not be by the hands of Herod, but by the Jews at Jerusalem. That city seemed to have an exclusive claim to the guilt and murder of God's prophets, and there he should suffer.

* "Many suppose that our Lord is not to be understood as speaking exactly of three days, but of a little period of time. See Hos. vi. 3. On this interpretation the word τελειωμαι, (I shall be perfected) may refer to Christ's finishing the work of redemption and being by death consecrated to his office as the great High Priest of our profession."—*Doddridge.*

Our blessed Lord then pronounced his affectionate but painful lamentation over Jerusalem. He was willing to collect her children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,—a most expressive figure of his willingness to keep and protect them. No bird equally cherishes its unfeathered young under her wing as the hen. None takes such pains in feeding them—none will defend them with equal care; and yet, though this was a faint picture of Christ's faithfulness and love, that ungrateful people refused the shadow of his wings, and the provisions of his mercy. No marvel that he prophecies of their desolate house—and, doubtless, the misery of the siege and the famine were increased by their rejection of the Lord of life. How will the suffering of sinners be increased, by the recollection of the mercy they have slighted! You who have already so often suppressed the fear of danger, and rejected the voice of conscience, be thankful that the voice of mercy in the gospel-message still sounds in your ears. Over you Jesus now weeps as he once did over the murderous Jerusalem, and he declares unto you, that "whosoever cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out." Remember that if you perish, it will not be through any want of willingness in Christ to save you; his language is—"Return unto me, for I have redeemed you"—"as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live—turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die?"

CHAP. XIV. 1—24.

CHRIST HEALETH THE DROPSY ON THE SABBATH—PRIDE AND VAIN SHOW CONDEMNED—MEN NEGLECT GOD'S INVITATION.

And it came to pass as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath-day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the Lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day? And they held their peace. And he took *him*, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things. And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any *man* to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bid-

den, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor *thy* rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed *is* he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

In the sixth chapter of this Gospel, we have heard what works may be done on the Sabbath-day—viz. all that is really necessary for our bodily support, and all that tends to relieve the body or soul of our fellow-creatures. Our Lord gives us here a fresh illustration of this rule by healing on the Sabbath a man afflicted with the dropsy. He knew that the proud Pharisees around him were ready to condemn him, and therefore he anticipated their objection, by asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" and when they were afraid to answer, he appealed to the practice of his accusers, who never failed to do that act of kindness towards their cattle, which they would deny to a suffering fellow-creature. Yet it could not have been kindness or compassion that moved them to loose their oxen or their asses, for then they must have felt the same towards the afflicted—It was self-interest! their cattle would be injured by confinement, and they would suffer loss, therefore they loosed them, and scrupled not to commit a greater breach of the Sabbath than they accused Christ of. How often do we see, that men will dispense with a great deal more for their own interest, than they will do for God's glory, or the good of their brethren. If a man expends

a large income in the support of earthly pomp and splendour, the world rather approve than blame him ; but if a zealous servant of Christ devotes some hundreds or thousands of pounds in the furtherance of his Master's cause and the spreading of his Gospel, such conduct is immediately condemned as folly and enthusiasm. How like are the enemies of Christ in all ages of the world !

While our Lord was at the house of this Pharisee, he set himself to correct some evils which he saw predominant there. Amongst the company, he perceived a spirit of ambition and self-preference—a desire of being distinguished by the rank which they held, or the seat which they occupied. This he endeavoured to correct by a parable suited to the occasion. It would seem, too, that this feast was a sumptuous one, or, at least, that none but rich people were invited to it. In order therefore, to counteract the pride which such a banquet displayed, he plainly told the Pharisee who invited him, that this feast was not such as he approved, and that instead of laying out his money in sumptuous entertainments, he could much better spend it in making provision for the poor. If the command of Christ be any authority, let those persons take a hint from it, who love to indulge in the parade of costly entertainments. Some persons imagine that they make many friends by their liberal invitations. *Acquaintances* they may make, but not *friends*. A friend is one who will be the same in adversity, as in prosperity. While there are numbers who would show us hospitality, as long as we had the means of returning their favours, how few would continue even that civility, if a reverse of circumstances was our lot. Oh ! the hollow friendship of the world ! Christian friendship is alone worthy our cultivation. Friends in Christ, will be friends in need. It is not meant to close the doors against hospitality, but rather to make those happy whose situation is the most helpless. *They* should be particularly marked for assistance whose afflictions incapacitate them from labour—"the maimed, the lame, the blind."

As our Lord had been speaking of a feast, he spiritualizes the subject, and leads the attention of those persons present to the great feast which he has prepared for the souls of men in the gospel of his grace. He speaks a parable, which primarily has reference to the Jews. For them, first, was the banquet prepared, and long before Jesus appeared, they were invited by the early prophets to partake of it, and they actually promised to attend. But when the time came, when the supper was prepared, when Jesus was present on earth, he sent his servants,

the apostles, saying, "Come, for all things are now ready." But the Jews declined the invitation, and then the master of the feast sent forth his servants into the highways and hedges, where a sufficient number of guests were procured. This represents the successful preaching of the gospel to us Gentiles, and our admission to the privileges of the Lord's ancient people.

The parable may also be suitably applied to denote the reception which the gospel meets with in our own day. Jesus has provided food with a royal bounty for the perishing souls of his rebellious creatures: there is "enough and to spare," of every thing we can want—pardon, justification, regeneration, present peace, and future glory, are all provided, and are freely offered in the Gospel of Christ. His appointed ministers proclaim the general invitation, "Come, for all things are now ready." Yet, after all, what painful indifference do we see to the love of Jesus! The vast majority of the world "immediately begin to make excuse." One pleads his attention to his farm; as if that were of more value than his soul; another excuses himself on account of family ties; as if his wife and family would not be as welcome to Christ as himself. But these are foolish excuses, adopted merely to cover the real cause—we *will not* come; we prefer the enjoyment of the world. This is the real language of the natural heart. What must the Father's displeasure be, after submitting to the cost of his Son's sufferings, and after displaying unparalleled love in his redemption, if we make light of his invitation, and prefer the amusements, or even the lawful engagements of life, to the paramount duty of devotedness to his service? The master of the house, justly angry at this ungrateful refusal, declares—"None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." This was the consequence of refusal; and how often have we refused, and yet,—wondrous mercy,—we are now once more invited, "Come, for all things are now ready." Do not begin to make excuse: the offer may never reach your ears again. God may this night swear that you shall never enter into his rest. Pray against the deceitfulness of the heart, so fruitful in vain excuses—bring all these deceptious thoughts to God's word, and in his strength, cast them away for ever, so shall you be meet partakers of this heavenly feast.

CHAP. XIV. 25—35.

HOW WE MUST FOLLOW CHRIST, AND COUNT THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP.

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it?* Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; *but* men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

THE Redeemer, in his various discourses and conversations, dwelt on the difficulty of being a true disciple of the cross. We might wonder at his setting out so fully the trials connected with the Christian profession, as tending to discourage men from embracing his religion. But our Lord did not seek for mere nominal disciples; all false systems have always been anxious to gain numbers on their side, without regard to high motives or sincerity—but not so Christ. He brought a message from God, and he willed that it should commend itself to the consciences of men. We cannot have a better evidence of the truth of the gospel; for had Christ been an impostor or a mere human teacher, he would have taught smooth things, such as are agreeable to man's corrupt desires, and were calculated to entice numbers to join the ranks of his disciples: but on the contrary, he has taught that we must be ready to give up all for his sake, we must oppose our corrupt desires, and resist the cravings of the flesh. This is to "take up the cross," and follow him at all times and in all places.

Again, we shall often find that creature-affection interferes with our entire dedication of our heart to God. It may be that our nearest relations are more inclined to the world than to the decided service of the Lord. They would have us go with them, and are grieved at our refusing compliance. Some of you

may feel this a great hindrance to your taking that decided step in religion which your conscience approves; but our Lord cautions you in this very chapter against allowing any tie, however near or dear, to check you in your spiritual course. His language is peculiarly strong on this point. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." The word "hate" means here a comparatively less regard; this *hatred* does not consist in wishing ill to our kindred or any others, but in being willing to lose their favour and affection, rather than give up our master: we must love God supremely, and nothing must be allowed to rival him in our affection.

When persons enter on their Christian race, they must first sit down and count the cost. As the man who is about to build a tower, or as the king, who is going out to meet his enemies in battle, would weigh the difficulties they have to encounter, and the resources to which they may apply; so all professors of Christ's name should well consider both their expected trials and their promised strength. It is not to be imagined that Satan would lose a soul from his dominion, and see him numbered amongst the good soldiers of Christ, without a violent effort to regain his lost prey. Reflect often on the trials and temptations before you, but always follow out the view, by weighing the immense source of grace and strength we have in Christ Jesus the Lord. If you build for eternity, you must needs expect opposition; but then the Lord of life is near at hand to give you strength and wisdom. If you have many bitter enemies to thwart you in your progress, remember that you are fighting for an imperishable crown, "a kingdom which cannot be moved." Oh, then let the Christian put in one scale all the trials to which he must be exposed in his course, all the temptations of Satan, and all the opposition of the world, and then, let him put into the other scale, the peace of mind which he enjoys, from a sense of pardoned sin through Christ, and the hope of future glory, and he will find an exceeding preponderance in favour of the blessings of Christ's service. This calculation is necessary, for if a man sets out, and then turns back, frightened by the difficulties that meet him, he justly becomes an object of the world's ridicule; they say, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Whereas, by calculating first, and considering that he can draw upon the strength of God in every difficulty, he may go on fearlessly. He will build

and not be disappointed; he will war a painful warfare, but he will in the end obtain the crown. God grant that if we are Christians, the salt of our profession may not lose its savour, but that we may help to season the mass of society in which we are placed, by the savour of our holy conversation and consistent walk.

CHAP. XV. 1—10.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP, AND OF THE PIECE OF SILVER.

Then drew near unto him all the Publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it?* And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

EVIL manners, it is said, often produce good laws; so in this chapter, the murmuring of the scribes and pharisees at the grace of Christ, and the favour he showed to publicans and sinners, gave occasion for a more full discovery of that grace, than, perhaps, we should otherwise have had. Three parables are spoken by our Lord to encourage the return of wandering sinners to the favour and service of the holy and merciful Jehovah, and to show the joy which their conversion produces amongst the heavenly host. Yet although the three parables were told to the murmuring pharisees to instruct them in the nature of Christ's mission, we may observe a difference between the two former ones and the last. *They* set forth the need of the preventing grace of God, whereas the parable of the prodigal illustrates the use and progress of repentance in the soul, and the blessed fruits of the same. Again, we may observe a kind of climax—each is increasingly precious—the money is more valuable than the sheep, and the son the most precious of all. There is also an

increased difficulty in their recovery—the small piece is more difficult to find than the sheep—and to restore a prodigal child is far more difficult than to recover a lost possession.* The two first parables we may consider together, because they have the same object in view, viz. to exhibit the rich mercy of God in Christ Jesus towards the penitent sinner.

In the parable of the lost sheep, we have a very striking representation of the love of the good shepherd. He first came into this wilderness of a world, where the whole human race were like sheep going astray, a prey to the roaring lion, who goes about seeking whom he may devour. And had not Jesus come to rescue us, we had all been destroyed by the great adversary of God and man. In this wilderness the good shepherd died to redeem us from the pit of destruction, and to bring us back to God. Here also he set up his fold, the church, where his sheep are kept in safety under his watchful eye. When it is said that he leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness, it does not imply that they are forsaken or neglected, whilst he is seeking for the one that is lost. They are safe, being in the fold, and may well be left whilst his compassion goes after the poor wanderer. And this enables us to understand the expression "ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." In one sense, all men need repentance, yea, daily repentance, for what man is there that liveth and sinneth not? but there is a difference between that repentance which first brings us out of the way of death into the path of life, peace and holiness, and that constant penitence for short comings which befits the most advanced child of God. In the former point of view the true Christian does not need repentance, because the "eyes of the understanding have been enlightened," and he has been "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The change has taken place, the great revolution has been effected, he needs not repentance, like one who is still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

We have then before us a picture of the good shepherd traversing the wilderness in search of the lost sheep. The Lord Jesus not only died for sinners, but takes infinite pains to make them acquainted with his great salvation, and restore them to the Father's love. Why else have we the word of life? such repeated ordinances? such messages from Christ's appointed ministers? All this is the searching of the great shepherd, who ordains the means of grace for our safety and holiness; and

* See Trench's Notes on the Parables, p. 358, 359.

blessed is that man who has heard the voice of his Saviour, and been brought back to God. We may judge of the immense importance of the salvation of the soul, when we learn that there is joy over *one* sinner that repenteth. No such joy pervades the angelic hosts when men obtain an earthly crown, but when a soul is brought to the knowledge of God—when the tears of penitence flow down the cheeks of the believer—when prayer and praise are uttered by the lips of the converted sinner—all heaven is filled with joy. Stop and think; has this joy been felt by angels on your account? has Christ proclaimed to them that you have been found—in a word, have you that repentance unto life, without which you cannot see God with peace?

It may be asked why there should be *more* joy over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine who need no repentance, or who have already repented. It cannot be that one soul is more precious than many; but the passage alludes to the joy of *recovery*. The converted believers referred to, were safe in the fold of the good Shepherd—the wanderer was on the brink of ruin—how unexpected the change—how glorious the deliverance! Angels are not acquainted with all things on earth, but Christ proclaims the conversion of his elect to them.—"I have found my sheep, which was lost." Have we reason to think that he has declared this of us, and filled heaven with joy on our account?

NOTE on v. 8.—Mayer says, "The woman in the parable of the ten pieces of silver, by the consent of all interpreters, setteth forth the Church with the pastors thereof, who after Christ's example laboreth to find again such as are lost in sin." We may doubt this unanimity; it certainly does not hold good of modern writers.

CHAP. XV. 11—32.

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise

and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it;* and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

We are all familiarly acquainted with the parable of the prodigal son. It is probable that the Jews and Gentiles are primarily represented by the two sons. The miserable state of those nations who had not the light of revelation is aptly pourtrayed by the prodigal's misery; and the jealousy with which the Jews regarded the reception of the Gentiles into the church, is well described in the conduct of the elder son. We may, however, apply it individually to all ages of the world, and consider the prodigal the emblem of the sinner reclaimed to God's service by his own grace—a subject which Christ evidently illustrates by the three parables—and the elder brother as the representation of the Christian who has not so openly departed from God, and has for a long time belonged to the household.

Men in a carnal state, and following the bent of their fallen nature, always act like the prodigal. They ask for their *portion in hand*, and are content to receive and enjoy the good things of this life, but have no thought for future provision when that is spent and gone. They desire these things, because they wish to be free from the restraints of God's service, and from the duties which his commands would enforce. When the prodigal got what he wanted, he took his departure from his father's house—like the sinner who lives without God in

the world. It is a sinful state, not a mere act of sin, but complete *alienation* from God. Sinners get as far from God as they can: this world is the "far country"—the city of destruction—in which they take up their residence. "He wasted his substance in riotous living," and was soon reduced to want. He spent all that he had, and then a famine arose.* Sinners throw away their own mercies—the favour of God—the offer of a Saviour: they then want necessaries for their souls; they have neither food nor raiment for them, nor any provision for futurity. This is a state of perpetual dissatisfaction—having spent all, he tried to labour, but he could only procure some husks for his pains. Husks were the fruit of the carob tree, which the people of Syria used for fattening swine. Thus men in a state of sin, reduce themselves to the level of beasts, instead of living on the realities of the eternal world; but even these *husks* soon fail them, they either cannot get them, or they cease to satisfy. Surely Satan, the *citizen* of that far country, and the master of the prodigal, is a cruel tyrant; he tempts his vassals at first by a golden bait, but he soon leaves them destitute, in all the bitterness and desolation of sin, without a real friend, and without a solid hope.

But let us now reflect upon his return. And what was the means of it? Affliction. When he was in want, "he came to himself." Happy are they, who, by means of any affliction are made to see the madness and folly of their departure from God! With what new eyes do they then behold the character of God—not as a strict and severe master, but as a kind father. The sinner when he is "come to himself," is made sensible that his folly is equal to his guilt, and that the meanest of those servants of God whom he formerly despised, is happier than he. He discovers that there is no hope of escaping destruction, but by returning to that God whom he has left, and therefore he delays no longer; he comes to the best resolution possible—and in the touching language before us, he stirs up his heart to seek God—"I will arise and go to my father—I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

When the Lord thus humbles sinners, and leads them to pass sentence on themselves, he comes to their relief. He sees their

* The great famine was the want of the word of truth—the citizen, the prince of the air—the farm, the measure of his power—the swine, unclean spirits under him—the husks, the doctrines of the world, barren and vain.—*Augustine.*
See also Matthew Henry's excellent Comments on this parable.

sorrow, he witnesses their groans and tears, he hears and accepts their broken petitions and confessions, and never upbraids those who loathe and abhor themselves. The kindness with which the prodigal was welcomed, gives a lively picture of the willingness of our heavenly Father to receive returning sinners. When they come to him through Jesus, a blessed reconciliation takes place. He throws over them the arms of mercy, and receives them into the bosom of paternal love. The broken-hearted penitent indeed feels himself unworthy of the least favour, but his Father puts him in full possession of all the blessings of his salvation, seals him with the Spirit of adoption, and comforts him beyond his largest hopes. Thus he is encouraged, animated, and even constrained by redeeming love, to walk with pleasure in the ways of holy obedience, and to delight in all the duties, as well as the privileges of his Father's house. Angels and saints rejoice that the lost sinner is found—that the dead is raised—and that the rebel is reconciled.

It may be difficult at first to understand the elder brother's anger, especially, if besides applying it to the jealousy of the Jews, we continue the individual application. But let us reflect again—that the Jewish pride and prejudice are features of our fallen nature and too often found in Christians;—we are disappointed in some professors, and then we become too suspicious, or we do not like to see others preferred to ourselves. In God's love there is no such drawback, and hence our want of love for souls may be often contrasted with the unsuspicious and unbounded love of God—all such comparisons will tend to humble us to the dust. Let each of us now ask ourselves these important questions: Have I been made sensible of my lost, dead, and ruined state! Have I felt the insufficiency of every earthly enjoyment to afford me *real* pleasure? Have I come to myself—to a right mind on spiritual matters? Have I mourned my folly in so long forgetting God? If not already done, do I now determine to "arise and go to my Father, saying, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son?" Be assured that you will never know what real peace is, till you have found it in reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. The arms of the Saviour are open to receive you, let your past life be what it may: his words are "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." * Do not wait for fitness: "all the fitness he requireth is to feel your

* John vi. 37.

need of him." Come then just as you are, with a renouncing of all self-dependence, and a reliance on his all-sufficient atonement, and you may be sure of a kind reception, of a full adoption into his family, and blessed employment in his household.

CHAP. XVI. 1—18.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD—TALENTS COMMITTED TO ALL—THE SERVICE OF GOD AND MAMMON CANNOT BE UNITED.

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches?* And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from *her* husband committeth adultery.

In order rightly to understand the parable of the unjust steward, it will be necessary to keep in mind the object which our Lord had in view in delivering it. It is evidently to impress us with the idea that we are only stewards of God here below, and that

we are to use all our talents and possessions to the glory of our heavenly Master, and the good of our fellow-creatures: but in following out this great object, he shows us that the children of this world are much wiser in the pursuit of their earthly schemes, than the children of God in fulfilling the great end of their calling. The steward in the parable is a picture of a worldly-wise man, who has an object to gain, and will accomplish it by any means. His master was about to discharge him for wasting his goods, and not having any prospect of subsistence after losing his situation, he formed a plan by which he might make friends of his master's debtors, so that when he was turned away, they might receive him into their houses. The plan was, to reduce each of the debts which they owed to his master, and, probably, to give them a receipt as if all had been paid. Thus they were saved a certain proportion of their debt, and, being themselves accomplices in the fraud, they dared not to inform against him. This, no doubt, was a cunning plan of the dishonest steward. He had an object to gain, and he was diligent, till he succeeded. "The lord commended him"—not Christ, but his own master; this is evident from the expression being a part of Christ's narrative of the parable, and not an observation made by him. His lord did not approve of his *injustice*, but regarded his conduct as a proof of great *cunning* and *worldly policy*. In this view, Jesus declares that Christians are outdone by the men of the world—how humiliating to know and observe that they are far more assiduous and persevering—far more cautious and watchful in their pursuits, than real believers are in the concerns of eternity.

From this parable our Lord took occasion to counsel his disciples to "make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,"—by this name, he signifies earthly possessions, because they are too often procured by unrighteous means, and because when compared with the true riches of God's grace, they are defiled and a source of great temptation. The disciples of Christ are directed to use these riches in "making to themselves friends," that is, to expend them on objects of mercy, that many being benefited by them, may pray for blessings on their benefactors. This answers to that part of the parable which speaks of the steward *failing* of his former resources, by being discharged from his place; yet, having made friends for himself by the use of his master's property, he was received into their houses. Thus when the believer *shall fail*, and shall be removed from his stewardship, by death, they whom he has

made friends by benevolence, "will receive him into everlasting habitations." Not that this will *merit* that blessed recompense, or that the persons whom he has relieved can dispose of it, or that they were all pious persons, and were removed to heaven; but the Lord is pleased to receive with acceptance all those acts of benevolence which are done from love to him. They are so many proofs of his own grace acting in us, which he will not forget to recompense.* Some also may be blessed by our efforts in those things which make for their peace, and these will, in a sense, be our crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord.

It is indisputable that the wealthiest of men, and indeed, all men, are only stewards to the great LORD of all; yet, alas! few duly consider this, and numbers may be continually "accused to him of having wasted his goods." The Lord is also frequently enquiring of them by his providence, and by his word, "How is it that I hear such things of you?" reminding them that ere long, "they must give account of their stewardship, and be no longer stewards." The great question which each of us should put to ourselves, is,—what shall become of me, when I am put out of my stewardship? This is the point which should occupy our chief attention, that we may have an abiding habitation beyond the grave. Many, indeed, seem to say, "I cannot dig—to beg I am ashamed:" they seem to feel that they cannot be saved by their works, and are too proud to ask salvation as the free "gift of God through Jesus Christ." Yet, if ever we are saved, we must be content to be beggars; to renounce all self-dependence; to beg for pardon; and to be indebted solely to the merits of the Saviour. It would be well if "the children of light" would, on scriptural principles, learn wisdom from the men of this world, and having chosen *their* object, would pursue it, as singly and constantly, as others do their worldly interests. In this case, what a privilege would wealth be! how much good might be done! But let it not be supposed that the rich only are stewards; some talent we all possess for which we must give account—something we all might spare, that is now wasted, to evince our faithfulness in a little; faithfulness in *little* things is too little thought of; but in Christ's view it is most important—all men have in *them* the opportunity of serving God, and of thus proving their fitness for greater trust. The *true riches* are heavenly things, and these only will

* See Acts x. 4.

last; but if we are unfaithful in our daily calling, and our various positions in life, it will evince our unfaithfulness to God, and our unfitness to enjoy and dispense greater things.* It is a great honour to be of use to the souls of men—let us pray for faithfulness to God, and he will use us as his stewards to men.

Religion is a principle which must occupy the whole heart, or none at all. The Scriptures allow no middle course. We know that it is the opinion of the world which prevents so many from taking that decided part which Scripture and conscience require; but why should the opinion of dying fellow-worms stand in competition with the wish of our only Redeemer? We cannot serve God and Mammon—a divided heart and a distracted service God abhors—to such he addresses the solemn question, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" May God grant us wisdom to see, and grace to choose that portion which is so *far* superior to the highest joys of the world. We hear that the Pharisees derided our Lord when he spoke of this decided separation from the world, as necessary. There are many still who deride the same opinion when delivered by the ministers of the Lord. God's word has, however, declared, that if we are Christians, we must come "out from the world and be separate." † Man's opinion, and man's ridicule will soon come to nought, but not a tittle of what God has said, shall ever fail of its accomplishment.

CHAP. XVI. 19—31.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am

* On verse 12. Cyril remarks—'Temporal riches are called another man's, and spiritual graces our own, because we have outward things for the comfort of others, but spiritual, that we ourselves may live thereby.'

† 2 Cor. vi. 17.

tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

In the preceding part of this chapter, Christ had instructed his disciples that all men were but stewards of the Lord's property, and exhorted them to a right improvement of that one particular talent,—earthly possessions—which he called "the mammon of unrighteousness." In the latter part of the chapter, just read, he illustrates more fully the guilt and madness of men in wasting riches on self-indulgence, by a parable, which is interesting and affecting in the highest degree.*

The rich man described, is not charged with having acquired his wealth by iniquity, and though he was clothed in the most costly attire, and lived in splendour, it is not said that he ruined his family, or defrauded his creditors. Nor is he accused of being an adulterer, a drunkard, or blasphemer. But his guilt lay in this—he was *an unfaithful steward*, who wasted his Lord's goods, neither using them to his glory, nor to the relief of the necessitous. However honourable he might have been in the world's estimation, he was not deemed worthy of a name in God's book, while that honour was conferred upon "a certain beggar," who was a child of God, though afflicted and distressed, and whose name we are told was Lazarus. This man having no power to labour, was supported by begging: he was laid at the rich man's gate, afflicted in body, but happy in mind. This beggar died, and having been a child of God, his soul was taken to rest. Though the dogs were his only attendants on earth, angels rejoiced to wait around his death-bed, and after his dissolution to convey his emancipated soul to the realms of light. The rich man also died, and no doubt had a funeral suited to his rank. According to modern customs, in that

* Ambrose and Calvin think that this is a true history. Maldonate looks upon it as partly historical, and partly parabolical. Lazarus means "helped by God," and being named, we have the idea of a real individual,—whereas, many things, as the conversation with Abraham, are clearly parabolical.

silliest of all vanities, we may imagine his poor, lifeless clay, laid in pompous state, surrounded with all the appendages of nobility. But where was his SOUL all this while?—in hell! He had been an unfaithful steward, and now he reaped the fruit of his doings. Lazarus, though poor, had been faithful, and now he was comforted. Let us not mistake this matter: "the good things" which the rich man had received were no more the cause of his destruction, than the evil things which Lazarus met with, were the cause of his salvation. It was the rich man's abuse of his riches, and Lazarus's improvement of his misfortunes, through the grace of God bestowed upon him, which made the difference.

The conversation between the rich man and Abraham, is not to be taken literally, but is merely introduced into the parable to show the happy or miserable state of future existence, and the sense which both the righteous and wicked have of their situations. What must be the sufferings of a lost soul, when we contemplate the picture here presented to us! Not a soothing word to give relief to an agonized conscience. Not a drop of water to cool that burning tongue that was once used to gratify sensual appetite. Not a momentary ease from pain! not a prospect of relief or termination! The state is then irrevocably fixed. Oh! sinners, there is a heaven, and there is a hell, and conscience tells you so, though your life bears a practical denial to both. Who would now deliberately prefer the rich man's lot in life, death, and eternity, to that of poor, though pious, Lazarus? Yet how few prefer, like Moses, "to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season!" * Alas! most men endeavour to forget or disbelieve the threatenings of God, that they may not be disturbed by painful reflections in the pursuit of worldly gratifications; so that they refuse to lift up their eyes to view their real state, till they drop into hell, and then they curse and bewail their own madness and folly, and envy the condition of the poorest saint, whom they scorned and ridiculed upon earth. Abraham said to the rich man,—"Remember." Yes, remembrance will enhance the bitterness of hell, when sinners call to mind the privileges they enjoyed, the mercies they slighted, the warnings they rejected, the time and talents which they wasted. Let us remember these things *now*. We have often deserved hell, yet, blessed be God, we are still in the land of the living.

* Heb. xi. 25.

To us the door of mercy is still open. Jesus still offers us pardon, and thereby peace with God: the Holy Spirit is still offered to new-create our hearts, and God still offers to accept all who come to him through Jesus. If we slight these invitations, we may be lifting up our eyes, to-morrow, in torments.

Let us observe in this parable, which relates to the invisible world, that no intermediate place is mentioned between heaven and hell. The rich man's sin was not what is called a *mortal* one, open and flagrant—but in the eyes of man, who looks not to the *principle* of sin, it was small or venial, and therefore if there was such a place as Purgatory, he would have been found there. This doctrine is a mere vain invention: a device of false teachers, a vain delusion to ward off the importance of decision. God looks to the heart, and if his love is not there, and we are living for self, we are ripe for hell. Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom—that is, he was placed *near* to that servant of God in light, there to enjoy the deep quietness of an innermost communion with God—a paradise of blessedness—that blissful repose which intervenes between the death of the faithful in Christ and their perfect consummation at his coming in his glorious kingdom—his joy was therefore immediate—with Abraham he now enjoys God's blissful presence. There are but two ways and two ends—heaven and hell.*

But this wretched man's sufferings were aggravated by the thoughts of his brethren sharing the same fate with himself. He had left five upon earth, who were living as he had done, and were, of course, hastening to the same place. Perhaps he had been their instructor in wickedness, and feared an increase of his own punishment, if they died impenitent; at all events he would be rendered more miserable by the upbraiding of those souls whom he had murdered. Men will be accountable hereafter for all the effects of their conduct, however widely they may spread, or durably they may last: even as he who wickedly sets fire to a house, is answerable for the burning of a city, if the flames should extend so far. The man once rich, now miserable, begged that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren to warn them of their danger; but this request is refused, as there was warning enough contained in the written word of God to convince them, if their hearts were disposed to receive conviction. It is vain to imagine that other evidence or means of instruction, would induce men to repent, whilst they neglect the word

* See further on Abraham's bosom in Trench's Notes on the Parables, p. 445—447.

of God. They who have perished in sin, could indeed tell such a tale of woe as would harrow up the soul with horror; but "the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple," and is the best means of converting souls. The same things are testified in the sacred Scriptures, which would be told us by "one that should come from the dead." He that rejects this testimony, "makes God a liar," and further proof would be improper. An apparition, or ghost from the other world, might produce great temporary alarm, but real conversion is the work of God's Spirit, which changes the heart, the desires, and inclinations. If the Lord knew that the rising from the dead would prevail, he that doeth all things for our benefit would not have omitted this means; but the raising of Lazarus did effect so little in the malicious Jews, that they sought to kill the Saviour. Yea, his own resurrection passed away without having an effect on the multitude: * but in the Scriptures we have the constant voice of God himself, and if we listen not to that word, nothing else will affect us,—let us pray for the Spirit of life and truth. God's blessing is promised to a faithful study of his holy word. But "if we believe not Moses and the prophets, neither should we be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

CHAP. XVII. 1—19.

CHRIST TEACHETH TO AVOID OCCASIONS OF OFFENCE—ON MUTUAL FORGIVENESS—THE POWER OF FAITH—CHRIST HEALETH TEN LEPERS.

Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe *unto him*, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

* See Chrysostom's eloquent exhortation to the reading of the Scriptures. Hom. x. in Johan.

Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up *their* voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw *them*, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. And fell down on *his* face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where *are* the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

By the word "offence" Scripture often means a stumbling-block, or an occasion of leading others to sin.* Man is so fallen that he is not satisfied in walking the broad road of destruction himself but as long as he is dead to God, he is occupied for Satan in spreading the leaven of sin through the world. Evil example joins with evil principles, in communicating this poison from one to another, and thus sinners are the means of leading others with them to hell. This brings down the curse of God mentioned in the chapter, "Woe unto him, through whom offences come." But how peculiarly painful this is, when the professed followers of Christ cause others to stumble by their inconsistencies. Better indeed never to have been born, better to suffer the most miserable death of the body, than to do injury to the weak members of Christ's body.

The forgiveness of injuries is required of the followers of Christ, to an extent that unassisted reason would have deemed neither practicable nor desirable. Our Lord told his disciples that they must not only forgive any occasional offence, but forgive it, however often it might be committed, provided the offender acknowledged his fault, and professed a determination to amend it. This seemed to them "an hard saying," and a command which far exceeded the power of human nature to comply with; they therefore intreated him to increase their faith.† They pleaded rather for faith than any other grace of the Spirit, because no act, be it ever so good in itself, is accepted by God,

* See Romans xiv. 13.

† πρόσθες ἡμιν πίστιν, verse 5,—"add faith unto us." 'As if they had said—unless we have faith, we shall never be able to abstain from revenge so often, but if thou wilt increase our faith, we shall be able to conquer even this sin.'—*Hildersham.*

unless it specially proceeds from love to the Lord Jesus, and faith in him; and because faith is peculiarly influential in producing a forgiving spirit. Till we know what we ourselves merit before God, and till we feel the power of a Saviour's love, we shall be inclined, more or less, to resent an injury. But when a person by faith sees Jesus as his Saviour, all his angry passions subside. Our Lord approved the prayer of his disciples, by showing the prevailing power of that faith which they asked for. What could convey an idea of difficulty more than the plucking up of a sycamore tree by the roots, and planting it steadfastly in the ocean? Yet, our Lord told them, that faith would be able to effect even that, if it was necessary and according to God's expressed will; and by this illustration he shows that faith can overcome all difficulties, and conquer the worst feelings of our fallen nature, because it lays hold on the power of God.

The design of the parable in the seventh and following verses, is to instruct us, by a view of what passes between a master and his servant, that God neither is, nor can be a debtor to any of his creatures for the best services they perform. As God's creatures we are bound to be his servants, and much more as those redeemed by the precious blood of Christ—a truth which makes the Christian feel "he is not his own, but bought with a price." We owe to God therefore our best services, and when any reward is bestowed, it must be of grace and not of debt. God has a right to our services—and "when we have done all," —reached to the highest point of obedience, to which any of the fallen children of Adam can arrive; still we are to confess—"that we are unprofitable servants"—*servants*, because we are bought with a price—*unprofitable*, because our service cannot profit the Lord, or because we are not worthy of the future glory.* Thus God beats down all our pride. For why art thou proud? Doest thou not know that in obeying thou doest but thy duty? in the neglect thereof there is danger—in the doing thereof, there is no merit of thanks. God doth require duty of us by the right of service, but because he is clement, he promiseth honour to such as labour, and the greatness of his benevolence doth exceed the toil of his subjects.†

The Samaritans, though hostile to Christ, were not forgotten by him. He had once been refused a passage through their country, but he tries once more, and succeeds, and many had cause to bless him for the journey. Ten lepers are here met

* Bede. † Chrysostom.

by him. Jews and Samaritans had no dealings one with another; yet being similarly afflicted, they flock together. Here were nine Jews in Samaria, and one Samaritan leper with the Jewish. It would seem as if these ten lepers had been *watching* for Christ; no attendance is considered long, so they may get rid of their disease. We are sensible enough of our bodily diseases: Oh, that we were equally weary of that worse disease which cleaves to our souls! Surely our spiritual maladies will prove mortal if not healed: these men had died lepers, if they had not met Christ. We shall die if we do not meet him likewise. Their prayer was, "Jesus, master, have mercy on us." We cannot have better patterns in prayer; we have the leprosy of sin; whither shall we go but to Jesus?

What mercy does the Saviour display! their disease is cured, ere they complained of it. He sends them to the Jewish Priest, because appointed to be judge of the cure of leprosy. This was intended as well for a compliance with the ceremonial law, as for the convincing of the Jewish priests, that Jesus who could cure the leprosy by a word, was truly God. These lepers went, and on the way were cured, yet though the miracle was equally wrought upon all, it was differently taken—for *one, only*, was thankful. The others were satisfied with the healing of their bodies—this man returned, and obtained the healing of his soul: he, too, was a *Samaritan*, and therefore the least likely to acknowledge the Saviour's power. Jesus well knew the hearts of all, and immediately inquired for the other nine. He notes down all his favours, and marks our ingratitude if we do not return to give thanks. Would to God that even one in ten among mankind, were duly sensible of his mercies, especially that of redeeming love; but we find many who cry for pardon and mercy, while suffering under pain and sickness, who, perhaps, ridiculed religion before, and never had a serious thought till then, and who, alas! when mercifully spared, forget their deliverer, and forget their promises.

CHAP. XVII. 20—37.

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM EXPLAINED—THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM A TYPE OF THE LAST WOES.

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for,

behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see *it*. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after *them*, nor follow *them*. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two *men* in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two *women* shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left, Two *men* shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body *is*, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

PERHAPS Christ had arrived at the great city of Jerusalem, or at least was near to it, when the Pharisees asked him when God would establish the kingdom of which he had spoken so much. He replied that they were deceived about the nature of this kingdom, which was not in its first aspect to come *with observation*, or outward pomp and show. The kingdom of grace must precede the kingdom of glory. It was even then set up *among* them by the personal ministry, miracles, and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and more fully by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Where He was pleased to touch the heart and bring men out of darkness into light, the kingdom of God was established *in* the souls of men, and it was found not to consist in "meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." * But though Christ shewed them that the kingdom of glory could not appear before his rejection by the Jewish nation, and his consequent sufferings as the propitiatory Lamb of God; yet he held out the intimation that his second coming would be attended with manifest glory, and so far from being a matter of concealment, it would be like the lightning that shineth from one part of heaven to another.

* Rom. xiv. 17.

Our Lord then directing his discourse to his disciples, tells them that distress was coming on the Jewish nation in general, such as they had never before experienced. He foretold that many would be cut off in the midst of their business, their gaiety, and sensuality, as in the days of Noah and Lot; and as this destruction would be very sudden, he directed his disciples to flee for their lives (when it arrived) without attempting to secure any of their possessions. He warned them further to remember Lot's wife, lest they also, through an attachment to worldly things, should look back to the world, and be involved in the general ruin. The destruction of Jerusalem is intended to represent that scene which shall yet take place at the second coming of the Lord Jesus, who will return in a day of wickedness, infidelity, and carnal security—of which the days of Noah and Lot are but types—then Jesus will not come to a *converted world*, but to a *waiting church*—a little flock; nor will he find righteousness established in the earth; but return to cast out the ungodly and introduce the reign of righteousness.

The disciples hearing our Lord speak of such sad calamities, inquired where these judgments should come to pass; to which question he answered by a proverbial saying—that "where the carcase is, there would the eagles be gathered together;" intimating that Jerusalem was the carcase, which the Roman armies, whose ensign was an eagle, would quickly find out and destroy.* This awful subject should make a deep impression on our minds. These prophecies of Jesus were all, in due time, *exactly* fulfilled: as certainly then as those which related to the destruction of the great city of Jerusalem *have* taken place,—we may with the same certainty expect the accomplishment of those which are yet unfulfilled. Eleven hundred thousand Jews are recorded to have perished at this siege; besides the immense numbers which had perished in other parts of the world at the same time! Our Saviour wept at the foresight of these calamities: he had the sympathies of our nature as well as the love of the Godhead—he could not therefore help shedding tears over the ungrateful city. And it is almost impossible for persons of any humanity to read the relation of them in Josephus, without weeping also.† Yet these were but types of that vengeance which shall yet overtake an ungodly world. May we be in-

* If we apply this passage to the antitype, we may consider the eagles to represent the saints who fly towards the object of attraction—i. e. our Lord's coming, which will gather together all his saints.

† See Josephus' Wars, Lib. vi.

structed by what we are now considering, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Jerusalem was destroyed for its contempt and rejection of the Gospel, and if God be still jealous for the honour of his Son, what may many among us expect who live in the neglect of the Gospel? How often should we repeat to ourselves the warning—"Remember Lot's wife." She had left Sodom to fly to Zoar, the type of the church; but her heart was not right with God, as her lingering looks toward Sodom proved, and therefore she was consumed by a jealous God. So we may outwardly join God's people, and to a certain extent give up the world and walk in the path of religion; but if we have not a single eye, nor that faith which overcometh the world, we may look back and perish amongst the enemies of God. O may we know the time of our visitation, and embrace the offers of pardon and reconciliation held out to us in the Saviour! Let us be willing to make use of the appointed refuge, Christ, our rock, our salvation, our safeguard; so that when the destroying angel shall unsheath his sword, we may be found amongst the number of those who shall be protected by the Saviour from the stroke of eternal vengeance.—Amen.

CHAP. XVIII. 1—17.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER—THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

And he spake a parable unto them *to this end,* that men ought always *to* pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are,* extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that

exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when *his* disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

In the first part of this portion of scripture, the efficacy of fervent and continued prayer, is exhibited by the short parable of the poor distressed widow, who, under great oppression, earnestly solicited the interference of a magistrate in her behalf. He being a man destitute of every good principle, refused for some time to undertake her cause, and at length only consented in order to be freed from her *importunity*. Jesus has directed us to draw a proper lesson from this narrative. If this was the conduct of such an *unjust* judge, how much more will the righteous and merciful Judge of all the earth be the just avenger of all those who draw near to him in prayer, through his beloved Son? * But how little is this duty, or rather this privilege of prayer, attended to by us, who call ourselves Christians? Some of us may be ready to say, we have prayed continually, but receive no answer to our petitions; but here let us follow the example of the poor widow in the parable,—though the Lord may seem regardless of our incessant cries, even for a considerable time, yet still we should persevere and expect his gracious answer. Let us not be discouraged, but like holy Jacob, let us wrestle with God in prayer, and say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me;" and assuredly the Lord will hear that prayer, which is offered thus in earnest: He will rescue us from the oppression of our spiritual enemies, and satisfy the desire of our souls.

Jesus lamented that at his coming, he should find but little faith on the earth,—a clear proof amongst many others, that the multitude shall be found in opposition to God, when our Lord returns in the clouds of heaven, and hence no universal kingdom of righteousness shall be established before the second coming of Christ. Should this be the day of our visitation, it is to be feared that the number of lively and praying believers, would prove to be small indeed. Ah! why is it that we distrust the promises of God? Why are we so backward to the duty of prayer, so cold and languid in the performance of it? How can we expect to overcome temptations, to obtain a new heart, and holy

* Rev. vi. 10.

dispositions, to succeed in our exertions, or rightly to understand the word of God, unless we are in the habit of earnest, persevering prayer? It is to be feared that the worst of men, the Turks, shall rise in judgment against many Christians, for amongst them it is a sufficient and legal objection to any witness if he has not prayed *six times* in each day. The persons who pray thus frequently, are Mahomedans, or followers of the false prophet, and yet, amongst professing Christians, there are multitudes who suffer many suns and moons to rise and set upon their heads, without ever lifting up their hearts to God, either to ask his blessing, or to acknowledge it. Let us all remember that prayer is the key that opens heaven. Prayer can do all things, for it moves the hand that moves the world.

Another parable was addressed by our Lord to those who boasted of their own goodness, and looked with contempt upon others. Observe the pride of the Pharisee—not one petition is offered up for pardoning mercy, but he brings God in, as it were, a bill of his services, summing up a long list of his righteous deeds, and magnifying himself as a person of more than ordinary piety, and finding all his comfort in a proud comparison of himself with his neighbour. How many pharisees in our day! how many are inclined to compare themselves with others, to boast of their freedom from scandalous crimes, and of their strict performance of the duties and forms of religion! On the other hand, let us behold the poor publican; like a truly humble and sincere penitent, he feared it would be presumptuous in him to lift up so much as his eyes to the place of God's glory in heaven, but with earnestness besought God to be merciful (or, as the word more literally means, to be *propitious)* to him, a poor perishing sinner. To such a contrite sinner as this, however wicked and flagitious his past conduct may have been, the promises of the gospel are addressed. Are any amongst us burdened with sin, and distressed? Let us return unto the Lord, through Christ, "who is the propitiation for our sins," and he will be merciful to us, and unto "our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The publican found this to be the case, for he went down to his house in peace, having obtained acceptance with God, while the proud, boasting pharisee, was sent empty away.

NOTE 1, v. 11.—The construction of the Greek, σταθεὶς πρὸς ἑαυτον, seems to require that the stress should be laid on his standing alone, apart from the publican—rather than, as in our version, on secret prayer, and this agrees with the character of the pharisee.

NOTE 2, v. 14.—"Justified rather than the other,"—understand μᾶλλον with Beza, and our translators—one was justified and the other was not, so the phrase implies.—See Poole's Synopsis.

CHAP. XVIII. 18—43.

THE RULER'S QUESTION ANSWERED—WE MUST FOLLOW CHRIST WITH DECISION.

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard *it*, said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting. Then he took *unto him* the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge *him*, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, *thou* Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, *Thou* Son of David have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw *it*, gave praise unto God.

AFTER our Lord had delivered the instruction contained in the preceding part of this chapter, there came to him a young man, who with tokens of superior reverence, asked by what works of righteousness he might obtain everlasting life. The young man, not knowing his sinful heart, and the defects of his obedience, boasted that he had, from his earliest years, performed every

duty enjoined in the second table of the law, to which he was referred by our Lord; and then asked, with a vain confidence, whether any thing further could be required of him. How gross the darkness! how fatal the delusion, by which many are so exalted in themselves as to say, "surely I commit no crime, my life is moral, I am far better than those about me; I am comparatively innocent; What lack I yet?

The young man having resisted conviction in one way, Christ proved him in another, requiring a testimony of the entire submission of his heart to God. One thing, said he, thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. This injunction given by our Lord, was more than the young man could bear, and (as we read in St. Matthew's Gospel*) he went away sorrowful;—he withdrew from the *only* Saviour,—preferring the enjoyment of his worldly riches, to the grace and full salvation promised to him by Jesus; and alas! is not this the case of many amongst ourselves? we may, like this young man, desire eternal life; we may go a great way, like him, in the outward observance of many moral duties, but if we come not to Christ, renouncing entirely our own righteousness as a ground of hope, and determining to part with every thing that stands between us and God, we have no saving knowledge of the blessed Gospel. Christ does not indeed say to us, "Sell whatsoever thou hast," but if we desire to be his, he will certainly call us to make some painful sacrifices. We must then be ready to relinquish the dearest objects in life, if it shall so appear to be our duty; we must deny ourselves, however difficult the task, and take up our cross daily, if we would belong to him. We must plead for divine grace to deliver us from all half-service, all halting between two opinions—in a word, to follow the Lord *fully*, with decision and with holy self-denial.

The disciples hearing our Lord's declaration about the danger of riches, cried out with astonishment, "Who then can be saved?" But how few are aware of the dangers of riches, and instead of *fearing*, do not almost all eagerly *covet* them? The affluent in general are satisfied with worldly possessions, as their portion; and the poor repine but too often, at the appointment of God, when they ought to be thankful that he has placed them in a situation more favourable to religion. Our Lord's promises are great to those who are ready and willing to sur-

* See Matt. xix. 22.

render themselves and all their concerns to him. He promises them "manifold more in this present time." This may either be understood to mean the divine consolations which most abound when great sacrifices are made for conscience' sake, and which are an hundred-fold better than all earthly comfort and possessions, as they best know who have most experienced them; or it may mean those providential interpositions by which the Lord often makes up in outward comforts of a far more valuable nature, all our losses for his sake, often too by providing *spiritual* friends in the place of those who have withdrawn from us in consequence of our attachment to his service.

And now let us turn, and behold our merciful Lord, on his last journey to Jerusalem; he knew that the appointed time of his sufferings approached, and yet, with a full view of all that was coming upon him, he hastened to finish his work; and when we reflect upon what this work was, even his dying upon the cross for sinners, should it not, in the first place, teach us what a dreadful thing sin must be in the eyes of the pure God, when nothing short of the death of his own Son could expiate it; and secondly, should it not lead us to think, that if God thus allowed his guiltless Son to suffer, how much more shall we suffer, if the guilt of our sins be allowed to remain upon our own hearts, unpardoned, and uncleansed, by the blood of Jesus.*

CHAP. XIX. 1—27.

ZACCHEUS SEEKS JESUS—A PARABLE EXPLANATORY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY.

And *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, *there was* a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the Publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that *way*. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw *it*, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore *him* fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of

* The case of the blind man (v. 35,) has been already noticed in the Comments on Mark x. 46.

man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he said unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me.

NEVER did our blessed Lord take a fruitless journey; but whether it were a soul to be saved, or a body to be healed, he was busy in one way or other, wherever he went. We here read of his being on his last journey to Jerusalem, and as he passed through Jericho, he displayed the power of his grace, in the conversion of a sinner. His name was Zaccheus; his trade was that of a publican or tax-gatherer; which, as it was generally maintained by extortion and oppression, made the person who held it, less likely to receive a serious impression: besides this, Zaccheus had another temptation in his way, "He was rich;" and our Lord who knew what care, pleasure, and pride, generally attend riches, has said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." Yet, Zaccheus was desirous to see Christ. It is to be feared, that curiosity was his great motive at first; but the Lord sometimes overrules this feeling to the future prosperity of the soul. It is good even to be in the way where Jesus can be met. Two obstacles, however, presented themselves to defeat his purpose, the crowd was great,

and he was small in stature. We shall always find some difficulty to encounter, when we are on our way to Jesus, but let us imitate the conduct of Zaccheus. His remedy for the crowd was to come out from it, and run before the multitude; his remedy for the lowness of his size, was to climb into a sycamore-tree. In vain shall we hope to see Christ, if we do not come out from the throng of the world. We must dare to separate from them, to leave them behind, if we wish to enjoy a sight of the Saviour. Our life is but a race—"let us so run, that we may obtain;" but we shall never gain the prize, unless we outrun the multitude. Zaccheus's thoughts were well employed in forming contrivances to see Jesus. He next climbed a tree. We have no height of our own to see Jesus. God has left many sycamores in our way. Prayer, public worship, and all other means of grace, are so many helps to our seeing Jesus.

Observe the Lord's distinguishing love. Little did Zaccheus think that Jesus would look up to him. Upon any day of public procession, many thousands see the king, whom he sees not, and if he singles out an individual, by a look or a word, it is considered as a high favour. What then must have been the value of that favour conferred on Zaccheus, when Jesus looked up, and said to him, "Zaccheus, come down." Here was more than he expected, far more than he deserved; there was nothing to recommend him to the Saviour: a publican—a sinner—an extortioner, yet, Jesus looks up, and calls him. Blessed Jesus! we are now below, and thou art above; look down upon us, sinners as we are, and call us in like manner! Had Jesus only said, "Come down," Zaccheus might have supposed it was a rebuke for his curiosity; but he added, "For to-day I must abide at thy house." What friendly intercourse is there between Christ, and those whom he calls. The good Shepherd "calls his own sheep by name;" he therefore spoke to the inquirer as to an old acquaintance, and so in fact he was; for Jesus knew him, before he knew Jesus, else had he never been desirous to see him. Can we wonder now that Zaccheus made haste, and received him joyfully? Oh, the joy of having Christ a visitor within our breasts: not as a mere visitor; when he comes, it is to *abide*. See now how the multitude murmur, because Christ singled out this sinner; just as the world now do, when one of notoriously bad character is called by grace, and mere moralists are left to themselves. Let us take care that our "eye be not evil, because Christ is good." Angels rejoice when a sinner is saved, so should we; and instead of

puzzling our heads why Christ called Zaccheus, and saved him, and did not call the multitude in the same way, let us rather take encouragement for ourselves, and hope, and pray, that as Zaccheus was saved without any deservings, we may experimentally know that salvation is of grace and not of works.

Behold now the fruits of the Saviour's effectual call. Zaccheus is a changed man. Unlike the rich youth, mentioned in the preceding chapter, his purse is now at the Saviour's disposal. He now gives liberally—half to the poor—four-fold to those whom he had wronged in his trade. Every real Christian is a conscientious person. Zaccheus does not say, I *will* give, but "I give," or *do* give: he did it at once. Those that defer their gifts and benefactions till their death, do in effect say—"Lord, I will give thee something, when I can keep it no longer."

When Jesus called Zaccheus, "salvation came to his house." Who can tell the worth of salvation? Eternity will be too short to count its value. Yet even here the person who is converted is unspeakably blessed. He has peace in his own heart; he is a blessing to all around, especially to his own house; where he orders all things by the word of God, and endeavours to lead his household in the paths of holiness and usefulness. He is a blessing to those with whom he transacts business: he is a blessing to the poor, and to all connected with him.

As our Lord approached Jerusalem, he found the people filled with the idea, that he was going to establish that temporal kingdom which they expected. Their error did not lie in expecting him to reign as a king, for the Saviour's "kingdom is yet to come, when his will shall be done *on earth*, as it is in heaven;" they erred, however, in their low idea of its nature, and their expectation of its near approach; "they thought that the kingdom of God should *immediately* appear." Our Lord does not deny that he would reign, but he explains to them, by a parable, that his reign would not take place till his second coming. He is the nobleman, who is gone "into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return," and on his return, he shall establish his kingdom. He came first in meanness—*then* shall he come in glory. Satan reigns over the earth at present—*then* Christ shall reign. There shall be "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;"* the righteous shall rise first, and reign with Jesus upon this new earth.† Well may we say with St. John in the Revelation, "Blessed

* 2 Peter iii. 13. † Rev. xx. 4—6.

and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." Thrice blessed are they who shall be partakers of this glory, and who shall then sit with Christ upon his throne. But let us recollect, that in order to this, the Spirit of Life must now dwell in our hearts. Satan reigns there by nature, but his dominion must be removed, and that of Christ established in its place; thus shall we be prepared to enjoy the approaching kingdom; but if we remain among the number of those who say, "We will not have this man to reign over us," let us be assured, upon the testimony of God himself, that we shall be dealt with as the persons described in the parable—"those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

We also are reminded by this parable, that we all have talents—some more and some less—*now*, by a right use of them, we can glorify God—for which purpose they were all given to us—*hereafter*, we must give in our account, and may we do it with joy and not with grief. The lazy servant who hid his talent in a napkin, is justly punished—for, in so doing this, he forgot his master's work, and proved he had no desire to glorify him—so that God will not be satisfied with cold, negative service. But how is it that the Lord rewarded the others? Their right use of the talents was not their title to glory, but the evidence of the reality of God's grace in them; and doubtless, God will reward this fully, even to a diversity of degrees of exaltation in the glorious kingdom. Some higher and some lower in station—all may be equally happy in their degree and capacity; but not all in the same position. May God make us faithful to our light, and use us as his own servants in time, and for all eternity. Amen.

CHAP. XIX. 28—46.

CHRIST RIDETH INTO JERUSALEM IN TRIUMPH—HE WEEPS OVER JERUSALEM, AND PREDICTS ITS MISERABLE SIEGE.

And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called *the mount* of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, Saying, Go ye into the village over against *you;* in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring *him hither*. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose *him?* thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him. And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto

them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him. And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as they went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed *be* the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things *which belong* unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple. But the Chief Priests and the Scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

As our Lord drew near to Jerusalem, he sent forward two of his disciples for the purpose of procuring an ass's colt, on which he intended to make his public entry, in accordance with the word of prophecy.* He directed them to the very place where the animal was to be found, and so minutely described the circumstances which should occur, that he showed his exact knowledge of things distant, and seemingly accidental. The narrative also proves, that the untrained animals, and the equally intractable minds of men, are subject to his Almighty power.

Never did the Saviour take so much state upon him as now when he was going towards his sufferings: other journeys he made quietly on foot, but this with equipage and acclamation. We are at a loss whether to admire most, the divine majesty which lay under so humble an appearance, or the sincere humility which veiled so great a glory. He whose "chariots are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels," made choice of a poor mean animal on which to be borne, and with this poor and despicable pomp, he proceeded to Jerusalem. Instead of kings of the earth, who, as they reign by his permission, might have been employed in his attendance, the common people were his

* Zech. ix. 9.

heralds, and their homely garments formed the foot-cloth of his way. It was his greatness and honour to despise that splendour which worldly hearts are so wont to admire.* And yet after all this, poor, dying man is captivated by pomp and pageantry and worldly show. We have promised to renounce all these things, "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world." Have we kept our engagements? If not, let us pray for the inclination and the strength to do so now.

When our Lord came nearer to Jerusalem, the crowd of attendants increased, and they showed their joy by such methods as were used upon the accession of kings to the throne; they acknowledged him as the Messiah who was come in the name of Jehovah; they wished prosperity to him, and to his kingdom, with "peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." It is to be feared that these expressions were more the effect of momentary excitement, than the result of heartfelt conviction, for within a few days we find many of the same multitude consenting to his death, and joining the popular outcry, "crucify him, crucify him."† Of how little value, in general, is popular applause! yet, even among professing Christians, the general disposition is, to go with the multitude. When no persecution attends the profession of the gospel, all are ready to cry, "Hosannah to the son of David." But when trials are to be met, and dangers encountered for Christ's sake, then they leave the Saviour to follow the crowd, and though few would actually say, "crucify him," yet they equally shew their disregard to him by joining his opposers, and refusing to support his cause. Happy they who are enabled to come out from the multitude, and boldly to confess the faith of Christ crucified, though learned Scribes, proud Pharisees, and popular opinion are arrayed against them. The numerous miracles which Jesus wrought, afforded abundant evidence that he was the promised Messiah. It was no wonder that the disciples of Jesus, called to the knowledge of the truth, and drawn out of that unbelieving nation, should testify for their master as the true Messiah. Surely, if they were silent, "the stones" of the wall should "immediately cry out;" a proverbial expression, in which perhaps, the calling of the Gentiles was alluded to.

* See Bishop Hall, on this subject in his Contemplations, xxv. lib. iv.

† v. 39 and 40, shew that many were true disciples; hence Scott has justly remarked on this song of triumph,—part joined in it truly, many might be favourably disposed and might act under an immediate impulse, and many knew not what they were saying. It was no wonder if several of the latter class should have afterwards exclaimed, "Crucify him."

But with all these flattering expressions of joy and respect, the Saviour knew the real feelings of the heart, and that this ungrateful city would fill up "the measure of its iniquity," by crucifying the Lord of glory; he was therefore bathed in tears at the prospect of that ruin which the sins of Jerusalem would bring upon its devoted head. He wept over the city and said, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." And he then predicts the coming desolation, which was literally accomplished within seventy years, when the Roman army, under the Emperor Titus, cast a trench about it, compassed it round, kept it in on every side, laid it even with the ground, destroyed its children, and left not one stone upon another.* This was a siege more dire than any that is recorded in the page of history, and our Lord has used it as a type of that destruction which shall overtake the impenitent world, who do not spiritually embrace the Lord Jesus, and who "know not the time of their visitation." We all have "a day of visitation;" a day in which the offers of mercy in Christ are laid before us; when pardon for the past, and strength for the future, is freely offered. And why do people not take advantage of these offers, and why do they not obey the voice of conscience? Because Satan blinds their hearts with the idea of "a more convenient season," or with the false hopes of an indulgent and merciful God; and thus they "know not the day of their visitation," and allow the opportunities and privileges placed within their reach to pass unimproved. Jesus now offers to wash away all our sins, to put down to our account the merit and righteousness which belong alone to him, to reconcile us to the favour of God, to restore the long-lost image of holiness which was defaced by the fall of man, and to renew us in the spirit of our minds. All these things are offered to us freely, through Christ, and now while the offer is made, let us not neglect the day of our visitation.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, because they had allowed these opportunities to pass by; and if tears of sorrow could be found in heaven, they would be caused by seeing so many prefer the idle vanities of life, while the things that would make for their peace, are wholly disregarded, or at least put in a secondary

* See the appalling account of Josephus. Wars, book v. especially ch. xi. and xii. The Jewish historian mentions that so many Jews were crucified by the Romans, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses were wanting for the bodies.

place. But let us recollect, that though Jesus wept over Jerusalem, yet he did not fail to execute vengeance upon it, as the event has fully proved; and though he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, yet he will assuredly accomplish his most awful threatenings on all who neglect his great salvation. Let us then pray that he may come and cleanse our hearts by his Spirit, and that as he once cleared the temple from all intruding traffickers, so he would remove from our hearts all those vain, unholy thoughts and desires which lodge within, and that he would purify them, and come and abide within us, by the reigning influence of his Holy Spirit.

CHAP. XX. 1—26.

CHRIST AVOUCHETH HIS AUTHORITY—THE EVIL OF FALSEHOOD AND DECEIT —THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

And it came to pass, *that* on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the Gospel, the Chief Priests and the Scribes came upon *him* with the elders, And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent *him* away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated *him* shamefully, and sent *him* away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast *him* out. Then said the Lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence *him* when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our's. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed *him*. What therefore shall the Lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard *it*, they said, God forbid. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And the Chief Priests and the Scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable

against them. And they watched *him*, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person *of any*, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Cæsar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Cæsar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's, and unto God the things which be God's. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.

THE chief priests and Pharisees having often failed in their wicked attempts to ensnare our Lord, now came to him in a fierce insulting manner to question his authority. They demanded of him some reason for his exercising that power which he had assumed, in clearing the temple; of which we read in the last chapter. The manner in which our Lord replied to them having been already explained in the two preceding Gospels, need not here be repeated.* Let us, however, notice the answer to our Lord's proposed question respecting John; they said they *could* not tell from whence he derived his authority. This was a manifest untruth. See how one sin leads to another. They sinned in rejecting John; now they try to conceal their guilt by a lie. Let us ask ourselves whether we are guilty in this matter. Perhaps we may not accuse ourselves of what the world calls open falsehoods, but is there such a strict principle of truth within us, as to make us shrink from uttering a word that cannot be fully borne out by fact? There are many falsehoods uttered, which fashion and custom call innocent; such as, strong expressions of love, pleasure, regret, or sorrow, so often to be found in the letters and notes of worldly persons which are uttered while the very opposite feelings exist. We may also instance the double crime of being *denied to visitors* under the excuse of being from home, which involves the guilt of those who utter the falsehood, and of the servants who are made to repeat it. The world may call these justifiable falsehoods, but the word of God allows no such distinction. A lie is an offence against God, whether it be concerning a trifling or momentous matter, and "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." † What need has each of us then to pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

The design and scope of the parable of the vineyard, was to

* See Comments on Matt. xxi. 25. † Rev. xxi. 8.

discover to the Jews their obstinate impenitence, under all the means of grace they enjoyed—their criminality in rejecting and murdering many prophets whom the Lord had sent to warn them of their sins—their fearful guilt in crucifying the Lord Jesus, which they would do in a few days after he spoke this parable to them—and the certainty of their losing their privileges, by having abused them.

We have parable after parable to show us the rage and enmity of the human heart against the religion of the Saviour. How can we, if faithful to his cause, expect a favourable reception from a wicked world, or from ungodly professors of Christianity, when the holy prophets, and the "well-beloved" Son of God himself were thus rejected with contempt, and treated with outrageous cruelty by his professed worshippers? The awful doom of the unbelieving nation of the Jews was recorded for *our* warning. We now have the vineyard and all its advantages, but do we as a nation, render the fruits in due season? Do *we* individually bring forth the fruits of righteousness? And if not, can we expect a milder doom than that of the Jews? "If God spared not the natural branches, let us take heed lest he also spare not us." * Numbers amongst us "stumble at the word, being disobedient," and thus fall on the corner-stone, and are broken; numbers, likewise, cause others to stumble by their unholy lives. Alas! few consider that we are accountable for all our privileges, and shall be the worse for them hereafter if they do not make us better now. Yet, blessed be God, there are some who adorn the Gospel by their holy lives. May we be found among them: may we attend to the voice of those whom the Lord sends to reprove or exhort us, in order to our increasing fruitfulness! may we reverence and obey the beloved Son of God! may he become more and more precious to our souls, as the firm foundation and tried corner-stone of the Church! Such he is now to all believers, but numbers stumble at the word, and thus fall on this stone and are broken, instead of building on it. How terrible then will the case of unbelievers be, when Jesus is manifest as the "destroying stone" that will fall on the kingdoms of a rebellious world, and crush them, and "grind them to powder." † May we be faithful and obedient even unto death! so, when he shall come to destroy his enemies, we shall be found among his ransomed people, and "receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

* Rom. xi. 21.

† See Dan. ii. 44, 45, manifestly referred to by our blessed Lord.

The last pretence that persecutors have, to destroy a prophet of the Lord, is to lay treason and seditions to his charge. Thus did the chief priests and scribes act towards our blessed Lord: they wished to "deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor." They therefore employed spies, * who put to him the question about paying tribute to Cæsar, hoping that by denying it to be due to him from the Jews, they might accuse him as an enemy to Cæsar. Christ's answer is an admirable rule for our direction—"Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's." In this way our duty to man will never clash with our duty to God—but entirely agree. The Bible never encourages opposition to constituted authority. Obedience to civil rulers is a solemn duty. The same word that says "Fear God," says also, "Honour the king." May we in all things evidence our obedience and consistency.

CHAP. XX. 27—47.

CHRIST SILENCETH THE SADDUCEES ON THE RESURRECTION—HOW CHRIST IS THE SON OF DAVID.

Then came to *him* certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him. Then certain of the Scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said. And after that they durst not ask him any *question at all.* And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David's son? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The Lord said unto my Lord,

* Verse 20—παρατηρήσαντες—curiously observing—as the steps of a wild beast are traced in hunting. ἐγκαθέτους—persons suborned as spies—the metaphor seems to be taken from letting down the net to catch fish. How great the malice of Christ's enemies!

Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son? Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the Scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.

OUR Lord having put the chief priests and scribes to silence, next encounters the Sadducees. It is generally supposed that their master, Sadoc, from whom the Sadducees took their name, taught that God was not to be served from *mercenary* motives; that is, (as he imperfectly explained it) from hope of reward, or fear of punishment. His followers interpreted this as an implicit denial of a *future state*, and so imbibed that pernicious notion of the utter destruction of the soul at death; a doctrine equally uncomfortable and absurd. The story by which the Sadducees endeavoured to prove to our Lord the impossibility of a resurrection, seems to have been a kind of common-place argument, as found in some of the old Jewish writers. They fancied that the future state would be like the present one—capable of affording sensual enjoyment, and that in it earthly connexions would be formed: but our Lord shows, that inasmuch as their ideas of that state were false, the arguments which they grounded upon them were invalid: that those who shall be counted worthy to obtain *that* world, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God. Observe, the inhabitants of that world do not obtain it by *their own* worthiness, for they have none; but they are *accounted* worthy, by having the merits of Jesus put to their account: *now* they become the children of God in his kingdom of grace, and hereafter shall they reign with Christ in his millennial kingdom, being children of THE resurrection—a resurrection of priority and glory, which the people of God alone shall enjoy, and which John speaks of in these words, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first* resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." * None shall reign with Christ then, but those in whose hearts he reigns now by his Holy Spirit.

The blessed Jesus next proceeded to establish the truth of that doctrine which the Sadducees opposed, from that part of

* Rev. xx. 6.

Scripture which they professed to believe ;—he therefore refers them to the words of God to Moses.* The Patriarchs had been dead a considerable time before this appearance of the Lord to Moses, yet he there declared himself to be the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Now, he is not the God of the dead, who have sunk into non-existence, but of the living, who are capable of enjoying his favour. The whole reasoning shows that the doctrine of the resurrection and of the future state, is as certainly contained in the Old Testament, as in the New, though not so fully and distinctly revealed. When Christ had baffled the insidious devices of his enemies, he then, proposed a question to them as they were gathered round him. He inquired what thoughts they had of the promised Messiah ? and how he could be the Son of David ? The design of our Lord's proposing this question to the Pharisees was, to endeavour to do away their erroneous opinion concerning the Messiah, who they thought would be a mere man of the family of David, and not likewise the Son of God. Christ then quoted these words from the 110th Psalm, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The question put to the Pharisees is this—how Christ could be both David's Lord, and David's son at the same time, and how David could address his own son by a divine title. It is very observable from our Lord's quotation here, and on several other occasions, from the Old Testament, that he considered that the writers of it were under such an extraordinary guidance of the Holy Spirit, as to express themselves with the perfect accuracy of speech at all times. And does it not behove us to inquire seriously what we think of Christ ? Should we not ask ourselves, do we sincerely believe in this adorable Redeemer ? Do we know him to be our Saviour ?—do we desire that all his enemies should be put under his feet, without excepting any of our sinful passions ? Of how much advantage should we find it to our souls to be more constant and earnest in making such solemn inquiries as these !

Our Lord further guarded the people against the doctrine and spirit of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were ostentatious hypocrites in their external observances, and who by their pretensions to extraordinary piety, insinuated themselves into the confidence of the people, and perhaps induced many persons, when they died, to leave them goods in trust for their widows and orphans ;

* See Exod. iii. 6.

thus they got the effects into their own hands, and, on one pretence or another, defrauded the widows and orphans of their property. Let us all look to ourselves that we possess not in any measure that hypocritical spirit so often condemned by our Saviour; and let us remember that however unblameable and even religious we may appear in the sight of men, yet unless our *hearts* be filled with the love of God, and are occupied in his service, our religion will profit us nothing. As there is then no possibility of deceiving him with whom we have to do, let each of us seek to have our hearts washed in that fountain of a Saviour's blood, which can remove every stain of guilt, and make us capable of standing before the bar of God, without fear or apprehension.

CHAP. XXI.

CHRIST COMMENDETH THE POOR WIDOW—THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM A TYPE OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had. And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, *As for* these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign *will there be* when these things shall come to pass? And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ;* and the time draweth near; go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end *is* not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and *some* of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains;

and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars: and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and *so* that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.

THE sacred wealth of the temple of Jerusalem consisted both in goods and in money. Upon occasion of the solemn feasts, when all the males came up to Jerusalem, the offerings of both kinds were liberal; and we here read that our Lord sat over against the treasury and watched the gifts of the several individuals. Nor is he less observant, now, than he was then; he sees every hand that is stretched out in charity. Why should we regard the perishing eyes of man, which can only see the outside of our actions; or that empty applause which vanishes on the lips of the speaker? The Lord seeth the *heart*.

Among those whom our Lord observed, one person was peculiarly noticed. She was a widow—this was misery enough; but poverty was added to her sorrows; and though her offering could be but small, yet did she not withhold it. Let those persons here learn a lesson, who decline giving anything in charity, because they are poor, or because they cannot give much. She cast in "two mites," or, in our reckoning, two half-farthings; yet our Lord says of her, that she cast in more than all the others; that is, in proportion to their different means: a mite to

her, was more than pounds to them; pounds were little to them —two mites were her *all.* What they gave, only left their heap less—she gave her all, at once, and left nothing behind. God does not so much regard what is taken out as what is left. Man judges by the worth of the gift; but God judges by the *mind* of the giver, and by the proportion of property which remains. Judging ourselves by this rule, could we stand a comparison with the poor widow? Have we exercised self-denial in the exercise of our gifts? have we taken from our own comforts, that we might add to those of others? We all have two mites to offer —a body and a soul: and though we have nothing else to present, let us devote these to the service of that Saviour to whom they justly belong.

The prophecies respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, and their typical reference to the events which shall take place at the second coming of the Lord Jesus, have already been considered in the commentary on the two preceding gospels.* Let us here endeavour to make a practical application of the subject to ourselves. The whole of this prophecy evidently shows us how vain and dangerous it is to trust in external privileges, and to cry out, as the deluded Jews once did, "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are we,"—for of this stately and magnificent structure, of which the Jews so much boasted, within less than half a century, not one stone was left upon another.

If our Lord urged his disciples, with such speedy and solicitous haste to flee from the sword of God's *temporal* judgment, how much greater diligence should we give to "flee from the wrath to come!" What are any of the little interests of life, that out of regard to them we should be willing to continue one moment longer exposed to a danger which may sink us into everlasting perdition and despair!

An awful description is here given of that aggravated ruin which came upon the Jews for neglecting Christ. They eagerly listened to the very name of a *Messiah*, by whomsoever it was assumed, while they rejected him whom God had sent, and who had so long, and with so much importunity, been renewing to them the offers of life and salvation. May none of us ever know the melancholy longing with which condemned sinners will wish, and wish in vain, for a renewal of those offers of pardon and peace which they now despise.

* See Comments on Matt. xxiv. and Mark xiii.

Let us now raise our thoughts to that awful day, when all that was accomplished at the destruction of Jerusalem, will be acted over again in more fearful reality. Where will our hope, and comfort, and safety be, in that day when "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, when the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken?" Where, indeed, unless we now take refuge in that Saviour "whom God hath set forth to be the propitiation for sin"—unless we now make him our friend, who will hereafter be our Judge—unless we obtain "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?" If we do so, then we may lift up our heads with joy, in the prospect of the re-appearance of Jesus in the clouds of heaven—of which he has given certain signs to his church, the accomplishment of which will quicken expectation and make believers feel that the glorious day of final redemption draweth nigh. These signs in the sun and moon, the distress of nations, with perplexity, and the threatened revolutions in the established order of things, do not seem yet to have occurred; for they will be so marked, that the church of God shall feel no doubt about them. Yet many buddings of the fig-tree appear. We may soon expect a more abundant outbreak of existing evils—we shall then lift up our heads with joy—the everlasting summer draweth nigh, and we should hail its approach with the church's anthem, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." While those who are now thoughtless about eternity, and are overcharged with the cares, the riches, or the pleasures of this world, shall call upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the approaching Judge—the church of God shall witness the convulsions of nature without dismay, and even hear the archangel's trumpet with delight. They shall go forth to meet the heavenly bridegroom—they shall join the hosts of the triumphant King, and shall finally have an abundant entrance into the glorious kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

NOTE v. 30, 31.—The glorious coming of the only begotten of God, illuminating the new world with his quickening rays, shall bring forth into light from more excellent bodies than before, the seeds that have long been hidden in the whole earth, i. e. those who sleep in the dust of the earth, and then reign the life of the new world.—*Eusebius.*

CHAP. XXII. 1—30.

THE JEWS CONSPIRE AGAINST JESUS—JUDAS BETRAYS HIM—CHRIST INSTITUTETH THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER—THE APOSTLES' AMBITION REBUKED.

Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude. Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me *is* with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat? or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me: That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

ALTHOUGH the Evangelists do not all relate the same particu-

lars of our blessed Lord's life, yet do they all agree in giving a particular account of his death and resurrection. The first symptom of that melancholy, but important event, occurs in this chapter, where we read of a conspiracy being formed against him by the chief priests and scribes. They held a council for the purpose, the result of which was, that they could not succeed by violence, and therefore determined to employ subtilty and treachery to accomplish their design. What instrument could Satan raise up for them so fit to work this wickedness, as one of Christ's associates? He who bore the bag, and over-loved the money, proves a ready accomplice in their crime. Who can trust to the influence of proper means, unaccompanied by the influence of the Holy Spirit to change the *heart*, when Judas, who heard Christ preach daily—who daily saw Christ perform miracles—and who doubtless performed miracles in his name, is at best a thief, and ere long, a traitor? Well did Jesus say, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." He was outwardly called to the apostleship, but inwardly he was an enemy to God—unholy and filled with Satanic poison. Can we be surprised at finding unconverted ministers in the visible church? or unholy members in the midst of the most plenteous means? Wretched Judas! whether shall we most abhor his treachery, or wonder at his folly? he offers to sell the Saviour's head, as if the wealth of worlds could purchase it. But observe the inconsistency of this wretched Judas. He had lately valued the ointment which Mary poured upon the head of Christ, at three hundred pence, (or about ten pounds of our money,) and now only values that head upon which the ointment was poured, at thirty pieces of silver, (or less than four pounds,) which was the price of a slave, when unfitted, by any inflicted injury, for his master's service.* Such is generally the disposition of worldly hearts; they set a high price upon the worthless things of this world, but as for heavenly things, or the God that offers them, these they shamefully undervalue.

The bargain is concluded, the price is paid, and Judas returns as if nothing had occurred. The passover is at hand, and no one is more busy to prepare for it, or more devoutly forward to receive it, than Judas. But though he so well concealed his treachery, our Lord did not conceal his knowledge of his intended villainy, for while they were all assembled at the last supper, He said, "behold the hand of him that betrayeth me, is with me on the table." Such is the power of Satan over the

* See Exod. xxi. 32.

heart of Judas, that he could sit by, and hear our Lord say, "woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; it had been good for that man if he had never been born," and yet so little did he allow his countenance to betray the secrets of his heart, that the other disciples sooner suspect themselves than him; "they began to enquire among themselves which of them should do this thing." It is well to be jealous over ourselves with godly jealousy, and when we hear of any action which excites our horror, let us not give vent to our anger against the person who committed it, but rather pray for them, and for ourselves also, that we may have strength to resist the same temptation, if placed in the same situation. If we are acquainted with our hearts, we shall know that they are capable of falling into any sin, unless restrained by the grace of God; therefore instead of boasting over others, we should pray for ourselves.

While Christ fulfilled in himself the ancient passover, and abolished its observance, he embraced that opportunity to ordain a new sacrament which succeeded to it, as baptism did to circumcision.* Jesus then took bread, and looking up with devout affection to God for his blessing, which separated the outward elements for sacramental purposes, he divided it into several parts, and then gave it to his disciples, commanding them to receive it as an emblem of his broken body; "Likewise after supper, saying—"this cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you"—it was a representation of his precious blood, whereby the new covenant was confirmed, and remission of sins obtained. Such was the institution of the Lord's Supper, nor can we doubt that the observance of it is binding upon us, since an apostle has taught that thereby we do "show the Lord's death till he come." † Those visible elements—bread and wine—which afford peculiar nourishment to our bodies, very fitly represent him, who *alone* can maintain the life and vigour of our souls—but as bread and wine must be taken before it can yield any nutriment, so, as to our souls, "except we eat the flesh of the Son of God, and drink his blood, we have no life in us." This is the office of faith—by which we as really feed on Christ in our hearts, as by the mouth we receive these outward elements of bread and wine.

To a true believer, what can be so calculated to gladden and

* The great Hallel was sung at the passover, i. e. Ps. cxiv. cxv. cxvi. The ancient Jews ask, 'Why do we sing it?' Because they say in it five things are commemorated—the Exodus from Egypt—the division of the Red Sea—the promulgation of the law—the resurrection of the dead—and the sufferings of Messiah.'—See Schoetgen, vol. i. p. 311, who cites, Pesachim, fol. 118.

† 1 Cor. xi. 26.

revive the heart, as the views of those inestimable benefits which are exhibited in this holy feast? What can tend more to inspire him with love, gratitude, hope, confidence, and zeal? It is one of the appointed means by which God is pleased to strengthen and comfort his people, and as our wants return upon us, so, by a frequent attendance on this ordinance, we should seek fresh supplies of grace. Those who are living in ignorance and contempt of God, should not profane this solemn feast by their formality and indifference. Let none of us suppose that there is any merit in going to the Lord's table; it is this idea that leads many to go at stated times to receive this blessed sacrament, merely as a duty, who still go on in the course of the world, seeking after vanity and folly. If then we feel not our need of Jesus, nor desire to please him, let us not insult him by presuming to eat of his bread, and to drink of his cup. But if we are bowed down with a sense of guilt, and depravity, and earnestly wish to accept salvation on the terms of the Gospel, let us not be alarmed at a sense of our past sins, but approach this heavenly feast, with humble confidence, assured that Christ alone can give rest and peace to our weary souls.

We next read of the strife of the disciples among themselves, who should be counted the greatest. These worldly and ambitious views, our Saviour reproved. He argued that though a fondness for power prevailed among the unenlightened Gentiles and the people of the world, it was quite inconsistent with the character of a Christian. He himself had come amongst them as a servant. He assured them he did not forget their attachment to him, and that he would exalt them much higher than they now desired, by making them partakers of the glory of his future kingdom. Christ has already come *in humiliation;* he is yet to come IN GLORY;* and as this earth was the scene of the former, so shall it be of the latter. "Them also that sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him;" if we wish to reign with Christ then, we must have him to reign over us now—He must dwell by the power of his Holy Spirit in our hearts—and renew them after his holy image.

NOTE.—Two cups are mentioned in this chapter, but in verse 17. it is ποτήριον—without the article. This seems to refer to the *first* cup at the paschal supper—of which four were blessed by the master of the feast—the third cup was called "the cup of blessing"—to which the eucharistical cup of the Lord's Supper answers, verse 20. See 1 Cor. x. 16. Greswell proves that Judas left the table before this was given, and thereby missed the comforting words in John xiv. xv. xvi.—See vol. iii. p. 109. See also Lightfoot, vol. ii. 257—261, for an account of the paschal supper.

* Titus ii. 13.

CHAP. XXII. 31—71.

THE FALL OF PETER—HIS REPENTANCE—THE DISCIPLES WARNED OF APPROACHING DANGER—CHRIST'S SORROWS IN GETHSEMANE.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take *it*, and likewise *his* scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me. 'And he was reckoned among the transgressors:' for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here *are* two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough. And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow. And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness. Then took they him, and led *him*, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, Saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this *fellow* also was with him: for he is a Galilæan. And Peter said, Man, I know not what they sayest. And imme-

diately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote *him*. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us, And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask *you*, ye will not answer me, nor let *me* go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.

THE Bible continually brings before us the weakness and sinfulness of man, and in no way more effectually than by the record of believers falling into sin. We expect to find the careless world living in the lusts of the flesh—but the children of God are called to holiness, and therefore, every fall amongst them is doubly affecting. Peter was graciously forewarned, that he would "be *sifted* like wheat by Satan," and from this, he might have expected no common temptation. Every one who knows the harassing power of temptation, can enter into this expression. Blessed be God, that Jesus is occupied in intercession for his people, even while his people are sifted; and not only is their faith kept alive, but the chaff of pride and self-confidence are often rubbed off, and the believer is taught many lessons for time to come—so with Peter. He professed the warmest zeal, and gave his Lord repeated assurances of his firm resolution in his cause; yet, except Judas, none of his brethren fell so low as he. He denied his master, not once, but a second, yea, and a third time, even with oaths and curses, as if he would, by that diabolical language, give a sensible proof that he did not belong to Christ. Nay, to aggravate it yet further, it was done in the presence of Christ, who surely was more painfully wounded by his conduct, than by all the rage and fury of his enemies. "Lord, what is man?" What is our boasted strength but weakness! and if we are left to ourselves, how do our best resolutions melt like snow before the sun! *

* What aileth thee, O Peter, thy voice is suddenly changed? Thy mouth full of faith and love is turned to hatred and unbelief; not yet is the scourge applied, nor yet the instruments of torture, thy interrogator is no one of authority, who might cause alarm to the confessor, the mere voice of a woman asks the question, a door-keeper, a mean slave.—*Augustin.*

The close of the chapter records the restoration of Peter to deep repentance; observe how it was effected. After the third denial, "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." He said nothing; but that piercing eye fixed in his conscience the arrow of deep conviction; his Lord's warning returned to his memory; his own vain boasting, the bitter ingratitude of denying such a gracious master, and the cause he gave the enemies to blaspheme. Holy sorrow sprung up in his soul, his heart was smitten, and rivers of water ran down his eyes, because he had not kept his Saviour's word. Who can suppose that Christ's eye did not follow him outside the palace, and mark this bitter weeping? Peter was never forgotten; the same grace which did not allow him to wallow in sin, like Judas, followed him, restored him, and kept him to the end; he was fully and *openly* restored by the Lord, after his resurrection,* and honourably employed as an apostle of Christ's church. Surely if such a fall says to each of us, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall;" such a recovery may well encourage the humbled believer, cast down with a sense of indwelling sin; and even lead those who have been backsliders, to return at once to their Father, whose language to such is, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away." †

As our Lord's sufferings drew near, he fortified his disciples against the persecution to which they should be exposed. Hitherto they had need of no defence; but now he warns them that perilous times were coming, when no one would think himself safe, if he had not a sword by his side. The disciples, on inquiry, found they had two swords, but our Lord intimates how little he would have them *depend* on such weapons, when he says, "It is enough." Two swords among twelve men would not have been enough, had it been intended that they should resist by force of arms: indeed, our Lord's command to Peter to put up his sword into its sheath, when he did use it, is proof that he did not mean the disciples should fight, but that his language was intended to warn them that danger was at hand, and that defence would be necessary.

Let us now turn aside to the garden of Gethsemane, and see this great sight, the Son of God in an agony. See him in this bitter conflict of nature, starting back, as overwhelmed with horror, struck with amazement and consternation, and encom-

* See John xxi. 15—18. † Hosea xiv. 4.

passed with sorrow and anguish! See him going backward and forward, at one time kneeling, and at another falling prostrate on the ground, seeking for comforters in his disciples, and piteously complaining, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" Going again and again to his Father, and praying with increasing earnestness of mind, that the bitter cup might, if possible, be withdrawn. His heart was fired within him, so as to force a passage through the body for his rarified blood, for "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." The agony of his soul must have been bitter beyond conception, when such was its effect upon his body—he was then bruised in the wine-press of divine anger for our sins. Gethsemane was a fit name for such mysterious sorrow: it means an *olive-press*—and there Jesus was bruised in spirit, as afterwards on the cross he was wounded in the body. We had sinned both in soul and body, and therefore Jesus, as our surety, must suffer in both. Who can describe these agonies of soul? Who can say, how our imputed sins pressed down the holy soul of the Redeemer? His own prayer proves the weight of such sorrow: "Let this cup pass from me!" By this he expressed the will of his humanity, which naturally shrunk from sorrow, especially such a bitter cup as his. He did not hereby wish to avoid suffering in the cause of our redemption, for he adds, "Not my will but thine be done." It was the Father's will thus to save us, and Jesus therefore went on with his wonderful work, and drank this bitter cup to the dregs.

What could have actuated the Saviour to undergo these sufferings, to submit to the scoffs, the spitting, the insults of a cruel mob, and then to stand at the bar of the Jewish council? It was love—love unparalleled, unbounded—love to the souls of sinners. And shall we think lightly of sin, which cost the Saviour so much? Shall we indulge in sin, which required his death for its atonement? Oh, that our hearts may bleed with true inward compunction for those sins of ours which caused Christ's agony, and drew blood from him in the garden and on the cross. Let us ask ourselves, have we been truly impressed by the record of these agonies of Jesus? Have we reflected that our sins, laid to his charge, drew forth this bloody sweat, and made him groan under the weight of such a burden? and do we now prize the Saviour's love beyond all other things? Does gratitude to him spring up in our hearts, and teach us to consecrate ourselves to him who gave himself for our sins? These are solemn

questions. May God enable us to answer them, to him who searches the hearts of the children of men.

NOTE on v. 42.—It is most probable that the "cup" which our Lord so much dreaded, was the withdrawing of the consolations of the Godhead, which took place on the cross, when he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The very prospect of which overwhelmed him with such horror. See Stevenson on Psalm xxii.

CHAP. XXIII. 1—31.

JESUS EXAMINED BY PILATE AND HEROD—PILATE ADMITS HIS INNOCENCY, BUT CONDEMNS HIM—CHRIST FOREWARNS THE WOMEN OF APPROACHING SORROW.

And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate, And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? and he answered him, and said, Thou sayest *it*. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and *to* the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long *season*, because he had heard many things of him: and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked *him*, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves. And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined *him* before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him: and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release *him*. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this *man*, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let *him* go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will. And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him

they laid the cross, that he might bear *it* after Jesus. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him, But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed *are* the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

THE history of our Saviour's examination before Pilate, who was the Roman governor over Judea, is here fully recorded Pilate finding that he came from Galilee, sent him to Herod, who was glad to have an opportunity of seeing a person of whom he had heard so much in his own country. He therefore put several questions to our Lord, in the full hope of seeing some miracle performed by him; but as Christ knew that Herod's desire did not proceed from any pure motive, but only to gratify his curiosity, he would not make use of his divine power for such a vain purpose, nor reply to any questions that were put to him: wherefore, we read that Herod, after treating him with the utmost contempt, sent him back to Pilate again. These two unrighteous judges were before at enmity, but on that day were made friends together. The wicked who are often unable to accord in other things, unite in their enmity against the Lord and his Christ. This hatred of God seems their only bond of union—how terrible such a combination, and how will the Lord, that sitteth in the heavens, have them in derision, accomplishing all his will, though all the kings of the earth were to set themselves against his "anointed." *

Pilate, very unwilling to be instrumental in Christ's death, several times came forth, professing that he found *no fault* in him, yet, notwithstanding these convictions of his innocence, he suffered himself to be overcome by the importunity of the Jews, and delivered the holy and innocent Jesus to the will of his murderers. It is a vain apology for sin, that it is committed at the instigation of others. It did not lessen the sin of Pilate that, to please the people, he gave up an innocent person, contrary to the dictates of his own conscience, to be crucified; and released, at their request, a notorious character, who, guilty of the aggravated sins of murder and sedition, was in custody at the same time; but what can exceed the wickedness of these Jews, who "denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to

* See Psalm ii. 2—5.

be granted unto them." * What a picture of the human heart, that desires any trifle, and cleaves to any vile lust, in the place of the blessed Lamb of God!

The unrighteous judge pronounced the awful sentence, that the holy Jesus, whom he had so repeatedly declared to be a blameless character, should be delivered to the will of the enraged multitude, to expire upon the cross. Here let us pause and meditate seriously on the whole of this amazing transaction. "Let us consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." Let us recollect the high dignity of the sufferer, and the cause of his voluntary humiliation. Surely the thought of such suffering as Christ endured, should open our eyes to the nature of sin, and to the holiness and purity of God; and surely the love of Christ should impress even the most hardened amongst us, with love and gratitude in return, and lead us to him, the blessed Saviour, as our only hope and refuge—as our *all in all.*

What we read in the 27th and following verses, is only found in this Gospel, and contains another prophecy of the dreadful calamities which happened about forty years afterwards at the destruction of Jerusalem. Our Lord, on beholding the lamentation of many women and others who followed him, bids them not to weep for him, as he was entirely resigned to his sufferings, and freely underwent them for the salvation of his people; but rather to weep for themselves and for their children, whose sins would, in a little time, bring the heaviest judgments upon their city. And Christ further adds, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If the heavenly husbandman did not spare the "green tree," the Lord of life, because our sins were laid on this innocent surety, how shall his wrath consume with everlasting fire, those who are the "dry wood," ripe for destruction, because they reject the mercy of God in Christ Jesus? O how solemn the admonition, and how needful is it still to weep and pray for the multitudes who yet remain in avowed opposition to Christ! Miseries far more dreadful than any temporal calamity, are coming upon all who continue to reject and make light of Christ and his Gospel. Alas! how many in that awful day will, in the horror of their souls, wish for utter annihilation, and cry to the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and "hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for

* Acts iii. 14.

the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand." Oh! that such of us as endeavour, by vain delusive arguments, to stifle the voice of conscience, could now be persuaded no longer to trifle with eternal things! We all know that *we must* die, and as we know not the moment God may see fit to call us, surely this certainty of death, and uncertainty of the time it may happen, is (or at least should be) the strongest argument why we should be always ready. And surely they who put off their soul's concerns until sickness comes upon them, can know very little of what a bed of sickness in general is. A fear of having the mind of the wretched invalid in the least disturbed at such a time, is, alas! but too often made an excuse by mistaken friends and physicians for silence on the subject of religion. They are then occupied with what regards the body, and the suffering invalid is unfit at that time to *begin* to think of the great concern of the soul, when pressed down by bodily weakness and distress. Let us then no longer delay—let us turn to the Saviour while he waits to be gracious —let us hasten in while the door of mercy is still open—while the Saviour's blessed voice calls us to come unto him that we may have life.

NOTE on v. 23.—Bishop Hooper, one of the Martyrs in Queen Mary's day, seems to have caught the spirit of his Master. One said to him in the prison, 'Sir, I am sorry to see you thus.' 'Be sorry for thyself,' said Hooper, 'and lament thine own wickedness, for I am well, I thank God, and death to me, for Christ's sake, is welcome.'—Fox's Acts and Monuments, A. D. 1555.

CHAP. XXIII. 32—56.

JESUS IS CRUCIFIED WITH TWO THIEVES—THE PENITENT THIEF—CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS OF SOUL AND BODY—THE CENTURION'S CONFESSION—JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA CRAVES THE BODY OF JESUS.

And there were also two other, melefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors; one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided *him*, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him, in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost

thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things. And, behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a counsellor; *and he was* a good man, and a just: (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them) *he was* of Arimathea, a city of the Jews; who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This *man* went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath-day, according to the commandment.

WE read that two atrocious malefactors were crucified with the blessed Jesus. He was placed between them, that he might lie under the greater odium, and this circumstance fulfilled the prophecy, uttered by Isaiah about seven hundred years before, "He was numbered with the transgressors." * One of the thieves also joined in the general ridicule, and while dying in his sins, strove to forget his own misery, that he might insult and deride the Saviour.† But though in this criminal we lament to see the extreme degeneracy of our nature, we are called to admire the sovereignty, freeness, and efficacy of divine grace, in the pardon and conversion of his fellow sufferer. Possibly he had never felt real impressions of religion before that awful season, or offered a sincere prayer to God. It is certain at least that he was expiring by the hand of justice for his iniquities, and could not plead any previous goodness of his own. But at this hour his heart was softened and renewed by divine grace; he believed in the Saviour, and received the full forgiveness of

* Isaiah liii. 12.

† St. Matthew and St. Mark say, that both the thieves reviled him, and this has led many to conclude, that the penitent thief was a blasphemer on the cross, and afterward converted. With Doddridge and most critics we may rather suppose that the plural is put for the singular by a very usual figure of speech, and that only one blasphemed. See also Calvin's Comments on the passage.

his sins. Thus, "one was taken and the other left;" who shall presume to find fault with God's sovereignty? who has any claim upon him? who shall dare to say that he may not extend his pardoning mercy to what objects, and in what circumstances he pleases? Many attempts have been made to obscure the glory of divine grace in the conversion of the dying thief, as if the example were of a dangerous tendency; but if we attend to it with godly simplicity, we shall find it replete with instruction. The penitence and faith of this malefactor, were conspicuous; the grace of God changed and sanctified his heart, while the precious blood of Christ, then streaming from the cross, expiated all his guilt. He reproved his fellow criminal for his daring contempt of the Saviour, and warned him to consider his danger. He openly and fully confessed his own iniquity, and the justice of that sentence by which he suffered; he vindicated the character of Jesus when there was none to plead his cause; he believed on him for pardon and salvation in that lowest state of abasement, and prayed to him as the Lord of life, in these words, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." Our gracious Lord listened to his cry, and assured him that he should be with him that very day in Paradise, or the place of separate spirits—a state of blessedness or communion with God—where no sin or sorrow is to be found. It is not indeed the full weight of glory, for that belongs to "the kingdom," which shall be manifest at Christ's coming and at the resurrection—of this, Paradise is the pledge, and, as it were, the first step. O how rich is the mercy of our God in Christ Jesus! One example of death-bed repentance has been given to us, that none might despair—and *only one*, that none might trifle with their opportunities in life and health. May God teach us to use this remarkable case for our own profit.*

The dying scene of the Saviour's life is not so fully described by St. Luke as by the other evangelists. On the cross the scene of Gethsemane was renewed—the cup was again presented to Jesus, and there he drank it to the very dregs. Here he could not manifest the deep and restless agitation of his heart by going to and fro, and changing his posture as he did in the garden, but it was indicated by other circumstances; his *words* marked it when he cried—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His *countenance* must have likewise marked it. And over that scene a veil was thrown—the sun

* See Bishop Hall's admirable contemplation of the crucifixion and of the penitent thief. Book iv. cont. xxxii.

was clothed with darkness; not only as an expression of divine displeasure against his foes, and a token of the awful darkness of his mind when under the frown of heaven, but also as an expression of respect for the sufferer, whose mental torture must, at that time, have "marred his visage more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men," * so that his countenance must have presented a spectacle more easily conceived than described.

But whence this horror in death, to Jesus, while many of his servants, even in the prospect of martyrdom, have exulted? The difference is to be found in this—Christ died as a *sscrifice for sin.* He bore the weight of his people's sins upon the cross, that he might redeem them from the curse of the law, and the power of death. He endured the weight of the divine displeasure, without the consolations of his own deity—without the support of the Spirit, which he vouchsafes to others. He was forsaken in this sense, that his people might never be forsaken. He renounced the blessed presence of the Father, that they might be blessed in life, at death, and throughout eternity. Thus the curse is exhausted, and the cup put into the hands of the Christian, has nothing of wrath in it, but is entirely medicinal, even in its most bitter ingredients.

With pleasure may we now survey the awful tokens by which God owned his dying Son. The veil is now rent by the death of Jesus. Let us be encouraged to "come boldly to the throne of grace," and obtain pardon through his blood. His death procured life for sinners. Are we among his people? Are we dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness? Have we, from a sense of our sinfulness, fled as guilty rebels to the Saviour's cross, and have we obtained the grace of forgiveness through his blood? If so, we are safe, and may view death as robbed of its sting; but if not, we may see from the Saviour's sufferings what an incalculable and intolerable load shall fall upon our guilty heads.

We find, though many remained thoughtless and obdurate, that some were ready to confess the crucified one—thus Joseph of Arimathea—a person of opulence, rank, and reputation—was not afraid or ashamed to appear as an advocate for Jesus in that state of greatest desertion, though he never before had the courage to avow the attachment which he felt. He requested of Pilate that the body might be left to his care, which

* Isaiah lii. 14.

being granted, he took it down from the cross, bound it in clean linen, and buried it in his own tomb: thus, though Jesus died with transgressors, he fulfilled a remarkable prophecy, by having his "grave with the rich." * The women who attended him, weeping, to the cross, took particular notice of the place and manner of his burial.

While we accompany Jesus to the grave, let us reflect upon our own approaching dissolution, and the gloomy habitations to which our breathless bodies must, ere long, be consigned; yet if true believers, we may even smile under this expectation. We should ardently desire to be conformed to our exalted head, and we may conclude that, like him, our flesh also shall "rest in hope." Let us then pray that having our corrupt affections mortified, we may be buried with Christ, and then we may rejoice in the confidence that our "Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after our skin, worms destroy the body, yet in our flesh we shall see God.†"

NOTE 1, v. 35.—*εξεμυκτήριζον*—lit. "turned up the nose at Him," to shew the intensity of the Jewish scoffing at Christ.

NOTE 2, v. 43.—*παράδεισος*.—The Septuagint uses this term to denoted the garden in Eden. Gen. ii. 9. See an excellent note on this word in Westein's edition of the Greek Testament.

CHAP. XXIV. 1—32.

THE WOMEN EARLY AT THE SEPULCHRE—CHRIST'S RESURRECTION DECLARED TO THEM—IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE—CHRIST APPEARETH TO THE TWO DISCIPLES THAT WENT TO EMMAUS.

Now upon the first *day* of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain *others* with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And, as they were afraid, and bowed down *their* faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary *the mother* of James, and other *women that were* with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they

* Isaiah liii. 9. † Job xix. 25, 26.

believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass. And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem *about* threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that while they communed *together* and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications *are* these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre: And when they found not his body, they came, saying, That they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found *it* even so as the women had said; but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. And they drew nigh unto the village whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

We find from the first part of this chapter, that those pious women who came with Jesus from Galilee, prompted by their affection for the blessed Saviour, went very early * in the morning to his tomb with the spices which they had prepared for embalming his body, and were astonished, on coming to the place, to find that the sepulchre had been opened, and that their Lord was gone. Their distress and doubts, however, were soon removed by the declaration of two heavenly messengers who appeared to them in human form, and assured them that Jesus

* ὄρθρου βαθέος—very early in the morning, or when the sun was sunk deep in the horizon; this shews the diligence of these holy women, of whom there were two companies: one, the party of Salome, mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Mark; the other, the party of Joanna, as in this gospel. See Greswell's Dissertation, vi. vol. iii.

had returned to life again, according as he had foretold. Thus these holy women were abundantly recompensed for their attachment to the Saviour.

We have already seen how great their affection and love must have been, from their following Christ, when even his disciples did not dare to appear; and now, early in the morning, we find them visiting the sepulchre, fearing neither the darkness, nor the soldiers who were placed to watch our Lord's body, lest it should be stolen by his disciples. So shall it be with all those who really and earnestly seek after Christ; the Lord will give them strength and courage to persevere, as he did to these weak though pious women. But it is, indeed, lamentable to remark how little of this holy zeal and boldness there is amongst those who profess the faith of Jesus. After the report of the women to the eleven disciples, they were all amazed and knew not what to make of it; but had they remembered Christ's words, they would have given instant credit to the report. Thus there are many things perplexing to us, which would be more plain and profitable, if we were in the habit of giving earnest attention to Christ's words, and treasuring them up in our hearts.

If Jesus be risen indeed, then the sacrifice he has offered is accepted, justice is satisfied, and nothing more is wanting for the expiation of our guilt: if we have fled to him for pardon and peace in dependence on the blood of his atonement, we may take up this song of exultation, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, *yea rather* that is *risen again*." * Since Jesus is risen, he has overcome death and the grave, and will make all who believe in him, partakers of his victory. How should this prospect animate our souls, if we are of the number of those who firmly believe in him for salvation!—but, ah! how different will be the portion of those who remain in ignorance and contempt of him! such shall also be raised, but it shall be "to shame and everlasting contempt."

How delightful a close of so melancholy a day was the journey of the two disciples to Emmaus! A day surely long to be remembered by them and by us! They were on a journey, but they did not amuse themselves with any trifling subject of discourse; their hearts were set upon Christ, and therefore their tongues were employed in speaking of him. And, behold, Christ himself, the theme of their discourse, makes one of their com-

* Rom. viii. 33, 34.

pany. In like manner we should speak of Christ from the fulness of our hearts "when we go out and when we come in," and he will, in some degree, join himself with us in spirit, so that we shall be refreshed by his presence.

These disciples bore an honourable testimony to that great Prophet whom God has raised up for them, as "mighty both in word and deed." But they knew not how to see through so dark a cloud; their hopes were almost extinguished, and they could only say—"we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Pitiable weakness! yet too just an emblem of the temptation which often prevails in the believer's mind, when he is ready to give up all, if deliverance does not come in the way he expected. Yet was Christ, even then, delivering Israel in the most effectual manner, by those very sufferings which gave them so much distress.

In faithful friendship, and with a plainness well becoming his office, the compassionate Redeemer upbraided them with their slowness of heart to believe these things, when they had received "line upon line, and precept upon precept," concerning them. How justly do we fall under the same rebuke in many instances! "Lord, increase our faith!"

We should reasonably have thought ourselves happy in an opportunity of hearing or reading this discourse of Jesus, in which he threw such light on the prophecies of the Old Testament, and proved that, according to the tenor of them, it was necessary that the Messiah should thus suffer, and so enter into his glory. As providence has denied us this satisfaction, let us, however, improve this general and very important hint, that *Moses and all the Prophets do testify of Christ.* May the blessed Spirit by whose teaching those mysterious predictions were uttered, so direct our inquiries, that every veil may be taken from our eyes, that we may see JESUS in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, and see him, in both, with that lively fervour of holy affection, which may cause "our hearts to burn within us;" so that we may be filled with all joy, as well as peace, in believing!

The two disciples, after their conversation with their risen Master, were doubtless astonished at their own stupidity—their doubts were all removed—they felt convinced of their Lord's resurrection. Thus, though in the morning, they were sad and grieving at the loss of their Master, in the evening we find them rejoicing, at knowing him to be, indeed, their risen Lord, the Saviour that should come into the world. And so it is

with many a sincere follower of Christ at this day; God sees fit, at times, as a trial of their faith, to hide his face from them; they mourn for the loss of that sweet and near communion with him which they once enjoyed, and, like the disciples, go on their way in sadness: but let not such despair, for they are the objects of the Lord's peculiar love, and though, for a little moment he hides his face from them, he will presently visit them with great loving kindness and mercy.

CHAP. XXIV. 33—53.

THE LORD APPEAREETH TO THE APOSTLES—GIVES THEM PROOFS OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND ASCENDETH INTO HEAVEN.

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things *were done* in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them *his* hands and *his* feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honey-comb. And he took *it*, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

THE two disciples at Emmaus, full of delight at the discovery of Christ, made no longer stay there, but hastened back that same evening, though it was late, to Jerusalem, to give vent to their own transport, and to comfort the hearts of their brethren. They found many of the disciples together, rejoicing in the

report that Christ had risen and appeared to Simon Peter: which was our Lord's third manifestation after his resurrection from the dead—first to Mary Magdalene in the garden, then to Cleopas and another disciple in the way to Emmaus,* and then to Peter. Well might a marked emphasis be laid on this great fact. "The Lord is risen *indeed*," for in this consists our assurance, that the Redeemer's work has been accepted for us, so that the early church might well use this form of salutation,—"the Lord is risen indeed." And here let us observe, what repeated endeavours our Lord used to confirm the faith of his disciples, in the doctrine of the resurrection. When he appeared to the two disciples in the walk to Emmaus, he not only expounded the scriptures, in proof of his sufferings and resurrection, but he was known to them in breaking of bread, and in eating with them, to prove that he had a real human body. He then came and stood in the midst of them, and pronounced a blessing of peace upon them, thereby assuring them that he was not come to resent their late unworthy treatment of him, (when they all forsook him in his sufferings,) but to satisfy them of his resurrection. He entered the room in which they were assembled, and the suddenness of his appearance surprised and affrighted them; but he, in tender compassion, dispelled their fears and removed their doubts, by shewing them his hands and his feet, with the wounds of the cross still impressed upon them. "It is I myself—handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." And when they still hesitated, through astonishment and unbelief, he asked for meat, and eat some broiled fish and honeycomb—not that there was anything peculiar in this kind of food, but because it was nigh at hand, and the fact of eating was sufficient to shew that he had a real, and not a shadowy body. And yet all was unavailing, until he opened their understanding to understand the scriptures. Blessed Saviour, what compassion is thine! How doest thou endure with our unbelief! may thy long-suffering melt our hearts, and may each of us exclaim, with thy convinced disciple, "My Lord and my God."

We may remark the special charge given to the disciples by our Saviour, to preach the Gospel to all nations; and although Jerusalem was the place of his crucifixion—the city which so cruelly and inhumanly murdered him—yet there, in his great mercy, he will have the Gospel first preached, and there they

* Mark xvi. 9—11.

were to wait, till the pouring out of the Spirit (according to the promise mentioned in the second chapter of the prophet Joel) should enrich them with all needful gifts and graces for the work of the ministry.

Christ having led his disciples out to Bethany, there blessed them, before he ascended on high. It was the part of the high priest to bless the people,* and Jesus therefore took leave of his disciples in that way, to show that he was going within the veil to live for them a life of intercession. As he was ascending, they adored him as their God and Saviour, and went back again to Jerusalem, according to his order, being filled with great joy at what they had seen, heard, and felt. In this manner they continued in the temple, waiting upon God; for the Jewish sanctuary was not yet destroyed, and the apostles and early christians often resorted thither until the Lord removed it and all its rites and ceremonies, by the desolations of war. We who now enjoy the light of gospel revelation, are thus taught the lesson, that if we would inherit the blessing and obtain the promise of the Holy Ghost, we must resort to the house of prayer, and seek the Lord there with "the multitude that keep holy-day." May we thus wait and pray for the abundant communications of this precious grace to our hearts, that we may be enabled to go forth to a life of devotedness in his service. Like the apostles, let us bow down and worship him, and while we continue here below, let us make it our daily care to search into those divine records which testify of Jesus, and to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

NOTE.—Few things are more difficult in harmonizing the four gospels than to trace out the order of events connected with Christ's resurrection. The best guide to this is to find out, if possible, his different *manifestations* between his resurrection and ascension; Gresswell has arranged them as follows: 1st. To Mary Magdalene. Mark xvi. 9—11. 2nd. To the disciples going to Emmaus. Luke xxiv. 13—27. 3rd. To Simon Peter. Luke xxiv. 34. 4th. To the eleven. Luke xxiv. 36—43. 5th. To Thomas. John xx. 25—29. 6th. To the Women. Matt. xxviii. 9, 10. 7th. To above 500. Compare Matt. xxviii. 16—20. with 1 Cor. xv. 6. 8th. At the Lake of Galilee. John xxi. 1—24. 9th. To James. 1 Cor. xv. 7.—See Greswell's Harmony and Dissertations.

* See Numb. vi. 23—27.

THE GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO

St. JOHN.

CHAP. I. 1—13.

PECULIARITIES OF THIS GOSPEL—THE DIVINITY OF THE WORD.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. *That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We now enter upon the history of our blessed Lord, as recorded by the last of the four Evangelists—St. John. He was in many things distinguished among the apostles; it is generally supposed that he was the youngest of the apostles, and that he outlived them all. He suffered much for the name of Christ—having been persecuted and banished, when more than ninety, to the island of Patmos—where he wrote the Apocalypse or the Revelation—after which he returned to Ephesus, and wrote *this* Gospel and three Epistles, and died about the hundredth year of his age. Thus he was inspired to leave with the church three

most important portions of the word of God. He seems to have been peculiarly filled with the spirit of love for God and man, and was therefore honoured as the bosom friend of the divine Saviour.

In comparing this Gospel with the other three, we shall find some distinctive marks. The others, probably, were written a short time after our Lord's death—this, not till after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the martyrdom of the other apostles; so that many things which were omitted by them, are here related; scarcely any of the miracles or incidents of the Saviour's life which they recorded, are here repeated; but the blessed discourses of the Lord Jesus are given to us with greater fulness and distinctness than in any other part of the New Testament; a circumstance which makes this gospel so peculiarly precious to the church.

The others commenced their history with the Saviour's birth —St. John passes this over, and at once sets himself to prove that important point, which by the enemies of the Christian church was already questioned—the divinity of the Lord Jesus. What a crafty device of Satan, to suggest doubts on so vital a question? If Jesus be not God, what hope can we have of reconciliation with the Majesty on high—how could he be a Saviour suited to our miserable condition? But truly he *is* God —for the inspired servant of God has declared that the Word was not only "in the beginning," but was "with God and was God." Jesus is called "the Word," because by him the mind of God has been revealed to man—even as our words declare the thought within us—hence this title is most fitly given to Christ. And how could his actual divinity be more fully expressed than by this testimony—"*The Word was God*"—which St. John goes on to prove by ascribing to him the glorious works of Deity. He formed the beauteous heavens, and created that very earth on which he afterwards suffered for the guilt of man, his creature. "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." *

But not only did Christ give "light" to the natural world, and "life" to its inhabitants, but he is the source of spiritual light and life to his people. Hence the apostle says that the Eternal Word was "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"—not that every man was savingly

* The exordium of St. John's gospel contains a statement of our Saviour's divinity so perspicuous and beyond all exception clear, that it can never be overturned by the daring attacks of interpreters and critics.—*Griesbach.*

taught by him, for in verse 10, we read that "he was in the world and yet it knew him not;" but Christ is thus declared to be the *only* source of light to the sons of men, even as the sun is said to give light to all men, though many are blind. All that are enlightened, are enlightened by him.* He alone can take away the darkness of nature. He shines into their hearts by his Spirit—he breathes into their dead souls the breath of life, and so creates them anew after his image. What joyful news ought this to be—that man, spiritually dead, may by Christ, be made "alive unto God!" Yet, alas! this light shines, and man regards it not. The God of this world blinds his heart that he may not see, and so "the light shineth in darkness." "He came unto his own" people, (the Jews,) and they received him not; at this we may feel surprise—but has he not come to us by the light of the Gospel and the ordinances of his religion? and yet how many in our day receive him not into their hearts, and feel neither sorrow nor surprise at their base ingratitude. Oh! how surprised shall many be hereafter, to find themselves eternally excluded from his kingdom, because they put away from them the light of Gospel truth, and chose rather the darkness of sin and unbelief.

But while the crowd rejected Jesus, some acknowledged him. So is it in the present day. The majority of hearers reject the Saviour, but there is always a little flock, "who "receive him" as set forth in the word. They are taught by the Spirit to value the light—they cleave to Jesus in the exercise of faith, and therefore depend on him as the rock of their salvation. Such are thereby made the children of God, not by natural generation, because their parents were called Christians, but spiritual children, because "born again" of God's Holy Spirit. We are all nominal Christians by the outward baptism of water —are we real Christians by the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit? Let us answer this impartially, now, before we are *obliged* to answer it at the bar of God. If we are not such, we are not in the way of salvation—if we desire to be such, let us remember that the power to become so, is of God alone; who confers on believers the exalted privilege of sonship—for "as many as received him, to them gave he *power* (or *privilege*) to become the sons of God."

* Augustine.

CHAP. I. 14—28.

THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST—FULNESS OF GRACE DWELLS IN HIM—THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent, were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

HAVING established the truth of the Divinity of Jesus, St. John next speaks of his humanity. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,* and we beheld his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Christ did not take our nature into union with his divine, to add to his glory, but to display it to us. Without such a manifestation of deity, we never could have approached God or beheld the rays of his glory. Nor could we expect remission of sins without the manifestation of God in human flesh. For unless he were man he could not have been our surety, nor made atonement for our sins—hence the doctrine of the incarnation is the foundation-truth of Christianity; but he *was* man as well as God, and in that united character fulfilled all the types and prophecies which related to his first coming, and which were delivered respecting him four thousand years before he took our nature upon him.

* ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν—"tabernacled among us." Some refer this to the feast of tabernacles, but it would rather appear to allude to the Jewish tabernacle—for there God dwelt between the Cherubims in the most holy place—a type of the more glorious manifestation in our nature.

In Christ "all fulness dwells," for the supply of the wants of all his people; for though God, in his absolute glory, is the well of life, of righteousness, of truth, and of wisdom, yet in the covenant plan of mercy, the second person of the Trinity is constituted our fountain of supply—always full and never diminished by the draught of God's children from age to age: so that we need not fear a drying up, or even a diminishing of this fountain of mercy; and therefore it is added that out of that fulness we receive "grace for grace"—that is, an abundant, constant stream of mercy. No sooner has the Saviour bestowed on us one favour, than another gift is ready to flow out of this spring of mercy. And so it continues until "death is swallowed up in victory." We cannot lay up any stock of grace in ourselves, but we are invited to apply in faith to the Lord Jesus, for all we want and when we need his mercy. This the law could not effect; for its holy, solemn voice rather shewed us our guilt than brought us relief; hence, for the curse of the broken law, "grace" or pardoning mercy came by Christ; and instead of its types and shadows, we have the "truth" or substance in the incarnate Word. Let us then bless God that salvation is of grace—let us rejoice that where Christ gives one portion, he increases the gift—where our wants exist, he supplies them all out of that inexhaustible fulness. But of what avail is all this to us, unless we make known to him our wants, and out of his fulness draw "grace to help in every time of need?" If we have not received, it will not be because there was no store of bounty, nor because Christ was unwilling to bestow his gifts, but because we, preferring darkness to light, were unwilling to ask.

When Jesus came forth to public view, John pointed him out as the very Christ of whom he had spoken. We must observe and admire the humility of John, who was so careful to assume nothing to himself, and to give all glory to Christ. The notice of the Jewish Sanhedrim was excited by the surprising effects of his ministry, and they sent messengers to inquire the nature of his claims, and the intent of his baptism. To them he replied that he pretended not to be any other than the harbinger of the Saviour; that he was not the Messiah, nor Elias, nor one of the old Prophets, but describes himself as "a *voice* crying in the wilderness"—a sound, that as soon as it has expressed the thought of which it is the sign, dies into air, and is known no more; thereby humbly meaning, that his office was fulfilled in being the herald of the Saviour.

What a constrast is the character of John to that of many in

the world around us! How often do we see a poor worm of the earth, swollen with pomp and pride, proud of his riches, or of his family, or of his rank, labouring to draw himself into notice, and never so happy as when he fancies himself an object of envy or of admiration. Surely such cannot possess the spirit of the Gospel, which teaches humility. All who act unlike John, and do not manifest the modest, retiring spirit which he possessed, have more or less of that pride which is despicable in the eyes of man, and hateful in the sight of God.

CHAP. I. 29—51.

CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD—THE CALLING OF ANDREW AND PHILIP—NATHANAEL BROUGHT TO CHRIST.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, The Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, A stone. The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of

Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

It appears that our Lord took up his abode for some time near the place where John was baptizing, probably with a view of attending upon his ministry, for it is evident that he appeared among his audience one day after another. Thus he became more publicly known, while John declared that he knew him to be the Messiah, by the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit at his baptism: and then pointed him out to all his followers, as the propitiatory sacrifice which God had appointed for the sins of a guilty world.

The theme of every faithful minister of the Gospel, is comprised in these words, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." He points to the atonement of Jesus as all-sufficient for the wants of sinners, and urges them by every argument to be drawn from the terrors of approaching wrath, or from the offers of redeeming love, to flee for pardon to the atoning blood of Jesus. God has provided no other sacrifice for sin; therefore by substituting works, or charities, or human sufferings, in the place of Jesus, we not only lose what we aim at, but by our very act we discredit the assertion of God; or, by adding these things to the work of Jesus, charge him with having offered an insufficient sacrifice. Christ is the Lamb of God, provided by infinite love for a guilty world, of which all the sacrifices under the law were but types, unable to atone for sin or cleanse the guilty conscience; hence he is called "*the* Lamb of God," because his sacrifice is *alone* effectual to remove sin.* Let each of us behold this atoning Lamb; let us apply to him individually, and may we know by our own happy experience, that, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." If not washed in this fountain, our guilt will sink us into endless perdition.

Such a testimony to the Saviour's character soon drew the attention of two of John's disciples to so remarkable a person; the one was Andrew, the brother of Peter; the other, it is pro-

* The comparison seems chiefly between the paschal Lamb, which could only sprinkle the outside, and Christ, the Lamb of God, who bore the whole weight of human iniquity; hence the expression is, not "sins," but "the sin of the world," as if to say all the guilt of mankind met on him, by imputation, and by him was expiated.

bable, was the evangelist who relates the fact, and who frequently forbears to mention his own name. Jesus observes the first motion of those hearts that sincerely turn to him, and affords them the most gracious encouragement. He will even anticipate their inquiries by revealing himself to them, as he did in the case before us. He marked the attention of the disciples who were watching his steps; he invited them to accompany him home, and admitted them to a free and delightful intercourse with himself.

And who that has obtained the knowledge of Jesus, will not desire to recommend him to the notice and esteem of his friends? Have *we* not a brother, or a sister, a relative, or a friend, whom, though a plain and faithful testimony of our experience, we may introduce to the Saviour? Thus it was, by the declarations and influence of Andrew, that Peter was brought to him, and immediately taken into his service, under a new and significant name. Every visitant met with a kind reception from him, nor will any who sincerely apply, be ever rejected.

But all the disciples do not come to Christ in the same way. Some owe their first serious impressions to the kind admonitions of a friend or relative—in other cases, human instrumentality is not so apparent. Andrew was made the instrument of calling Peter, but when our Lord came into Galilee, he himself called Philip. Observe now, how religion spreads. Philip has become impressed, and he, too, has a friend about whom he is interested, whose name is Nathanael. To him he immediately goes, and says, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Are we labouring for the spiritual improvement of those around us? Let us not hastily conclude that we are truly *religious*, because we feel an anxiety to relieve the temporal wants, or provide for the temporal comforts of the poor; these may be the fruits of benevolence—a mere *natural* quality which may be possessed without having a spark of vital godliness, or of saving faith. Real religion will not be deficient in these same fruits—nay, it will produce them in those persons who did not naturally possess a benevolent disposition; but it will not stop *there*, it will create a love for the *souls* of men, a desire of benefitting them spiritually, and will make us active in all the means by which that object is to be accomplished. But how can we love the souls of others, when we do not love our own? And how can we be said to love our own, while we indulge in

those things which will bring us to perdition? Have *we* found Jesus of Nazareth to be a precious Saviour? If so, let us publish the glad tidings. But if not, we are yet in spiritual darkness, and never can be rightly employed in his service.

Nathanael is next brought to Christ—he is said to be "an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile"—a lovely character—because the Lord had given him *sincerity* of purpose in seeking for the truth, and soon showed him the way of peace; though reluctant at first to follow Philip, he was induced to accompany him, and was soon convinced that he too had found the Messiah, for Jesus related to him what he had been doing, while he thought no eye beheld him; nor was it a *human* eye that watched him in his retirement—it was the eye of Jesus, who knows what we are engaged in, as present amongst us, and who can read the secrets of our hearts, though wrapped in closest concealment. This fact convinced Nathanael that Jesus *was* the Christ; but he was told that he should have fuller evidence when the Lord should appear in the glory of his kingdom—when he should see him, not as the despised Nazarene, but as the reigning Messiah. We shall never enjoy the glory of that reign of righteousness, unless we search after Jesus as Nathanael did, and until, like him, we are enabled to say experimentally, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

NOTE on v. 45.—Lightfoot, Hammond, and others suppose that Nathanael was afterwards called to be an apostle, and then named Bartholomew; John xxi. 2, seems to confirm this view, as there Nathanael is mentioned with the other Apostles and the name of Bartholomew omitted.

CHAP. II.

CHRIST AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST AT CANA—THE MIRACLE OF TURNING THE WATER INTO WINE—JESUS GOES TO JERUSALEM AND PURGETH THE TEMPLE—FORETELLETH HIS RESURRECTION.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called and his disciples to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do *it*. And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare *it*. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that

was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. After this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days. And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence: make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*. And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

Soon after our Lord's arrival in Galilee, he and the few disciples whom he had now attached to himself, were invited to a marriage; probably the marriage of a relation, since his mother, and some other of his kindred were there. He was not inattentive to the calls of social life, nor wanting in any offices of respect or kindness, to those with whom he was nearly connected. He condescended therefore to be present on that occasion, and to partake of the entertainment—not from any pleasure in vain show and feasting, such as influences the men of the world—but to show, as the Church of England has inferred from this circumstance, that he "adorned and beautified the holy estate of matrimony." He thereby testified "that this is an honourable estate—instituted of God in the time of man's innocency,—signifying unto us the mystical union there is betwixt Christ and his Church." *

There was one circumstance which added a peculiar lustre to this marriage, as it proved the means of displaying the miraculous power, and manifesting forth the glory of Jesus. The

* See the form of solemnization of Matrimony.

family by whom this wedding-feast was provided, do not appear to have been in affluence, and probably on account of their extraordinary guest, there might have been a larger company than was expected, so that there was not a sufficiency of wine. The mother of Jesus represented to him the defect, hoping and intimating that he might supply it by his divine agency. But she met with a rebuke for seeming to direct him in anything that belonged to his divine power, since where the Godhead was to be exerted, he owed her no obedience, and could not be subjected to her control. It is probable that she made this request with all the authority of a mother; if so, she forgot that she was the mother of his flesh, yet not of his deity. He was obedient to her as a mother, but she must obey him as her God. This circumstance has been left on record, as if to show the folly (not to say idolatry) of those who pray to Mary to *command* the intercession of her Son; and how little they can avail by such prayers, may be gathered from the fact, that even when on earth, where her authority as a mother was the greatest, she could not prevail to hasten a miracle one moment before its proper time. "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" says Jesus.* Observe these words from the lips of him who never was deficient in filial affection, and the only way they can be understood is, by regarding them as a rebuke to Mary for interfering with his divine will and pleasure, both as to the time and mode of performing the miracle. If Mary could hear the prayers that are now offered to her, and were to intercede as often as it is pretended she does, she would meet with the same reproof as before. Jesus added, "mine hour is not yet come"—by which he intimated, that the miracle should be performed when he thought best. Accordingly he did perform it to the astonishment of all present, and changed the contents of some vessels of water into wine.

This miracle is sometimes quoted to prove the doctrine of Transubstantiation; and it is asked, cannot Christ as easily change the bread and wine into flesh and blood, as he did the water into wine? We answer, yes—just as easily; but the

* Verse 4—τί ἐμοί καὶ σοι is rendered by our translation very justly, "What have I do with thee?" but in the Douay version, "What is that to me and thee?" to avoid the appearance of a rebuke, though in all other passages they render the phrase as we do. See Matt. viii. 29—'Used here it is as much as to say—that which doth miracles in me, was not formed of thee. Thou didst, indeed, bear that which was infirm in me, in regard of which I will in due time acknowledge thee, when I hang on the cross.' (Augustine, Tract viii. in Johan.) One proof out of many that the Fathers translated and interpreted scripture more like Protestants than Romanists.

question is not what Christ *can* do, but what he *does*—and there is no Scripture evidence that he changed wine into real blood, and required us to drink it. The proof of Christ's miracle here was known by the changed appearance of the water; it no longer looked or tasted like water, but had all the evidences of being real wine.* Thus, whenever a priest can change the taste and appearance of the bread in the Eucharist into that of flesh, we will believe in Transubstantiation; but, upon the authority of Christ's miracle, we say, that we have no reason from Scripture to believe *that* to be flesh, which *looks* like bread—*feels* like bread—*smells* like bread—and *tastes* like bread.

In order to draw practical instruction from this narrative, let us recollect that we are all invited to a marriage-supper, not as mere guests, but as the bride; for Christ is the bridegroom of the church—his spouse.† We are all invited in the gospel to join that spiritual church of true believers, to which Christ will hereafter be joined in bonds of such eternal love, as those of the fondest earthly connection do but faintly prefigure. Are we true members of the church of Christ? Have we obeyed the invitation of the Gospel? Have we separated from the world? and do we bear the marks of being renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God? If so, we shall rejoice to hear the herald's summons—"Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him."‡

Soon after this, our Lord went up to Jerusalem, to celebrate the feast of the passover for the first time, and immediately on his arrival, proceeded to the temple, where a remarkable transaction occurred. Among other profanations of that holy place, the outward court was grossly violated by being made a public market for the sale of cattle to be used in the sacrifices. Jesus felt a pious indignation at this shameful abuse, and set himself to reform it, which he did effectually. Whence, but to a supernatural impression of his divine power, can we attribute the tame submission of these busy merchants? Some, indeed, did question his authority, but not with an intention of yielding to it. He therefore answered them, as he always did such cavillers, in disguised language, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This they understood not, but afterwards

* It was not a mixture, but a creation, the simple nature of water vanished, and the flavour of wine produced; not that a weak dilution was obtained by means of some strong infusion—but that which was, was annihilated, and that which was not, came to be.—Hilary de Trin. iii. c. 5.

† See Chap. iii. 29. ‡ Matt. xxv. 6.

made use of it as the ground of a charge against him.* It was meant as a prophecy of his own resurrection—that infallible proof of his divine character; and in that view was recollected by his disciples to the increase and confirmation of their faith. Thus it frequently happens, that the very same doctrines and texts of Scripture, which are an offence and a stumbling-block to some, are to others the source of joy and consolation. Let us pray, that in the reading of the Scriptures, the veil of prejudice may be removed from our hearts, as well as the scales of natural blindness from our eyes.

While *we* profess to be satisfied that Jesus should purge the temple at Jerusalem from profane attendants, let us ask ourselves, are we willing that he should purge our hearts from all worldly and sinful desires, and prepare them for his spiritual worship? Can we say, that we never profane his house of prayer by carrying our merchandise thither? Are our minds never employed there, in thinking about worldly matters, or running after schemes of trade, as if we were in open market? What, then, would Jesus say if he were to appear amongst us? But he *is* amongst us, for "all things are naked and open in his sight." Oh! let us pray him "to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit," and to make them temples of his spiritual residence.

NOTE v. 20.—It has been questioned, whether the forty and six years in which the Temple was being built, refer to the second temple built by Zerubbabel, or to the work of rebuilding and adornment by Herod. Lightfoot has satisfactorily shewn that the latter is referred to here. See also Elsley's Annotations, vol. ii. p. 232.

CHAP. III. 1—13.

CHRIST TEACHETH NICODEMUS THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto

* See Matt. xxvi. 60, 61.

thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you *of* heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.

As yet, we find but few attendants upon our Lord's ministry, and of these few, none of the rich or noble of the nation. Here, however, we are introduced to one of the higher rank, who sought after Jesus with an earnest desire of being instructed in his doctrine.

Nicodemus, a person of consequence as a magistrate, and a member of the great Jewish council, paid him a visit; it is remarked that he came "by night," to shew that he was fearful of the reproach and opposition which this step, if known, would draw upon him. Many a timid Christian acts the part of Nicodemus, and conceals, under the shades of evening, or retirement, his attachment to Christ—not having sufficient boldness to confess Christ before men. But if he possesses the same sincerity that actuated Nicodemus, there is no doubt but, ere long, he will "let his light so shine before men, that they shall see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven." Let us now, like Nicodemus, sit at the feet of Jesus, and may we have grace to receive implicitly, that important doctrine which this portion of Scripture brings before us.

The Jews, and especially the Pharisees, boasted of their descent from Abraham, and vainly supposed that a strict observance of the outward duties of religion, would ensure their salvation. This was a fatal mistake, and our Lord therefore made known to Nicodemus the necessity of such a change in the heart, the will, the affections, and pursuits, as can be expressed in no less forcible words than those of our Lord—A NEW BIRTH—a change so complete and remarkable, that the person who experiences it, is as different from his former self, as if he were born into the world again, and appeared in a new character. Our Lord says, "except a man be BORN AGAIN, he cannot see the

kingdom of God." * "He cannot see,"—that is, he cannot perceive or understand the things relating to his spiritual kingdom. He is under the influence of the *flesh*, which imports here, as in other parts of Scripture, the corrupt nature we have from Adam; † and "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" ‡ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." We derive an evil and unholy principle from our parents, as they did from theirs, and all must be traced up to Adam's transgression, in which all his children are involved, and by which we all are partakers of a sinful nature. As long as a person is under the sway of the flesh, he is ignorant of himself—ignorant of Christ—ignorant of the true meaning of his Bible—he knows nothing yet as he ought to know—"he cannot see the kingdom of God." But when the Holy Spirit enlightens his understanding, he then sees all things plainly: the scales of natural blindness fall from his eyes, and every object around him is seen in a different point of view from what it was formerly, being viewed now with relation to eternity. Such a change of mind, or of mental vision, necessarily produces a change of affections, by raising them up to heavenly things, and thereby influences the whole character and conduct; and so great is this change, that the person may be said to be "born again." But not only is this change of heart necessary in order to the understanding and enjoying spiritual things; it is also indispensably necessary to everlasting salvation, for our Lord adds, (after Nicodemus expressed his astonishment at the doctrine) that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God:" and a third time repeats the same, "marvel not that I said unto thee, ye *must* be born again."

So revolting is this doctrine to the natural heart of man, that many persons have been at great pains to explain away its meaning; but such persons give the most decided proof that *they* are *not* "born again," for if they were, they would not oppose that doctrine which stands at the root of Christ's religion, and which every true child of God receives, upon the evidence of his own experience, as well as upon the testimony of God's revelation.§

By some we are told, that the expression "born again"

* Many would read this, "born from above,"—ἄνωθεν generally meaning this rather than "again"—yet not always, see Gal. iv. 9. Our Lord most likely spoke in Syriac, and this is definite here, as appears from Nicodemus' mode of understanding our Lord.

† See Rom. viii. 5, 8. ‡ Job xiv. 4.

§ 2 Cor. v. 17. James i. 18. 1 Peter i. 23.

means only an *outward reformation*: but this meaning would not have astonished Nicodemus, as it appears to have done. Others tell us that it means nothing more than baptism, because the grace of God is always given at this sacrament, and regeneration, they say, never takes place at any other period of life. This, however, is not only contrary to the fact recorded in Scripture, that many adults *first* believed,* (and they could not believe without the quickening Spirit,) but it ties the blessing to the *mere* use of God's ordinance. In all other cases, there must be faith and prayer in exercise, and why not in this? Children indeed cannot exercise faith themselves in the promises, but they are presented to God as the offspring of believing parents, who are invited to expect, (with the sponsors and congregation,) that God will reward faith when it looks for the inward blessing with the outward sign. Baptism is the external symbol of regeneration; the water which is applied to the body, fitly representing the operation of the Spirit, in purifying and sanctifying the soul, and when rightly administered, and faithfully entered upon, we cannot doubt the divine blessing—"the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the Holy Ghost, are *visibly* signed and sealed;"† but it must not be made a mere formal act, as if it communicated a blessing without any exercise of faith and repentance.

When any one is "born of the Spirit," he partakes of the holy nature of that divine agent by which his new birth is effected; thus "that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." In producing this change, the Holy Spirit works secretly, and his work is therefore compared to the wind—not only because the Spirit works *when* and *how* he will—in all the freedom of divine grace, as the "wind bloweth where it listeth," but because He is no more visible to our senses, than is the wind which blows around us; we can only know whether a person is "born again," by the total change of his life, as we are sure that the wind blows by the gentle motion of the leaves upon the trees, or by the sound of the ruder storm. Seeing, then, that these things are so—that this total change of heart, of life, of disposition and pursuit, is necessary to salvation—what question so important can each of us ask ourselves as this—Am I "born again?" Have I been thus changed and renewed by the Spirit of God? Do I see things differently? Do I feel differently?

* Acts ii. 41; viii. 37; xvi. 14, 15. † Article XXVII.

Do I act differently? Am I now occupied about my soul's salvation? Have I been enabled to give up all known sin? And is the way of holiness my chief delight? Answer these questions before that God who searcheth your heart, and if you have reason to fear that you are yet a stranger to these things, pray for the Holy Spirit to "create in you a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within you."

NOTE on v. 5. With a few exceptions, the whole Christian Church has understood—"born of water" to refer to baptism. Grotius and a few others have tried to shew that "water and the Spirit" both refer to the Holy Ghost, by a figure of speech which expresses one thing by two phrases, and quote Matt. iii. 11, "baptise with the Holy Ghost and with fire"—but they forget that the visible sign in the latter case *did* take place. Acts ii. 3.

CHAP. III. 14—36.

THE GREAT LOVE OF GOD TOWARDS MEN—THE SAFETY OF BELIEVERS—AND THE CONDEMNATION OF UNBELIEVERS—JOHN'S WITNESS CONCERNING CHRIST.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judæa; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all *men* come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I *must* decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that

hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure *unto him*. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

In this portion of Scripture we are directed to that period of Old Testament history, when the Jews were punished by fiery serpents for their murmuring against the Lord; Moses, at the divine command, raised up a brazen serpent on a pole, that every one that was bitten, might look upon it and live.* And our Lord's mode of referring to that occurrence, shews that the brazen serpent was a type of his own death: *there* a serpent hanged up, did heal the sting of serpents; *here* one hanged upon the cross, healeth the sting of an incorporeal serpent; *there* by their bodily eyes, they received health of body; *here* by spiritual eyes, remission of sins; *there* a serpent did bite, and a serpent healed; *here* death destroyed, and death saveth.† The same truth is declared to us in those comfortable words of our Lord Jesus, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." When we reflect that this *world* was so corrupt and debased, full of ungodliness and rebellion, and then dwell on the wonderful gift which the Father bestowed on it, in sending his only-begotten Son for man's salvation, we can more easily enter into the emphasis of this passage, "God *so* loved the world," &c. Surely it was love unparalleled, and which passeth all understanding, that he should feel such compassion for sinners, as not to spare his own Son, but freely give him up for us all.‡ The greatness of our misery, and the inconceivable value of such a gift, do, indeed, *commend* the love of God to us,§ in a way that should fill us with wonder, love, and praise. Our Lord then proceeds to explain to Nicodemus the riches of redeeming love, and who they are that possess and enjoy the same. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." At his *first* coming he did not come for condemnation. He came to make an atonement, and to work out a righteousness, whereby men might be saved; and so surely as those who believe in him, have "passed from death unto life," and shall not come into condemnation, so surely are those who be-

* Numb. xxi. 8, 9.
† Chrysostom, vol. viii. p. 154.
‡ Rom. viii. 32.
§ Rom. v. 8.

lieve not, in a state of spiritual death, and if they continue so, they shall be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord," when He shall come the second time, to take vengeance on them who know him not.

We should rejoice that Jesus has made a full atonement by his blood, and therefore all trembling penitents may be encouraged to "look unto him and be saved," for he is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." If God were to deal with us according to the strictness of his law, our condemnation would be unavoidable; but the Gospel proclaims mercy to all, without exception, who, feeling their lost and ruined state, seek pardon through that Saviour whom God has provided. And let us rejoice that this is a *present* as well as a future salvation. "He that believeth on him is not condemned;" even now the true believer is pardoned and justified—faith applies to him the virtue of the Redeemer's atonement, and the blessed effects of his obedience—the thunders of the law are hushed—the justice of God is satisfied. "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"—happy Christian, your's is a blessed portion, for God's pardoning love is your's: He is for you, and who can be against you?

But how different is the case of unbelievers. They may possess certain appearances of virtue, yet, not being impressed with any deep conviction of sin, they have no true value for the Saviour, and, therefore, being destitute of that *faith*, which is the appointed means of deliverance from condemnation, they remain under the sentence of death, and under the wrath of God. "He that *believeth not*, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Even *now*, the wrath of God hangs heavy over the mere nominal Christian, like the thunder-cloud ready to burst upon him, and it is only God's long-suffering which prevents the execution of the curse of the holy law of God. Some may say they have prayed for faith, and did not obtain it. But, they have never prayed *as they ought*, or they would have obtained it. They may have asked for spiritual blessings, but they wished to retain some sinful gratification along with them—they wished to be saved, but they wished to enjoy the world at the same time. Here, then, is the secret of the matter: "This is their condemnation—they love darkness rather than light—for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Sinners will be judged for their neglect of the means afforded them; and it will be found that

the real cause of their not obtaining the faith of the Gospel, is their rooted aversion to that purity of heart and conduct, which the gospel requires. A sure test is here afforded *us* for the trial of ourselves. What reception do we give the gospel? Do we "come to the light," and desire to be minutely searched by it? If not, how shall we defend or account for our contempt? Unbelief is an offence more destructive than any other, for it effectually bars the door of mercy; and although we cannot produce faith in ourselves, yet as it is offered *freely* to all those who ask it *sincerely*, we shall inevitably perish if we die without obtaining it.

When the followers of Jesus began to increase, the disciples of John were disturbed lest their Master's reputation should suffer. But the Baptist immediately corrected their jealousy and narrowness of spirit, and with an astonishing humility, rejoiced that the Saviour should be exalted, even though his own renown amongst men might thereby be impaired. He then spoke of Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church—the Lord from heaven—the well-beloved of the Father—the universal governor. Instead of feeling a desire for self-exaltation, he was thankful for being called, like all faithful ministers, to be "the friend of the bridegroom," whose office and privilege it is to point out the beauty and glory of the head of the church. John was content to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and so must we be satisfied to cast down self, that Christ may be exalted, and habitually aim at realising the truth.—"A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." Oh that all those puny mortals, so far beneath John in real dignity, and who yet fill their several stations with as much pomp and importance, as if their own hands had placed them there, would remember that they owe their all to the dispensing hand of God, and that as they can receive nothing except from him, they have nothing to be proud of!

NOTE v. 34.—ἐσφράγισεν—"to set a seal" to a document, is to attest or confirm it; so God the Father is said to seal the Son, ch. vi. 27—or by outward signs and miracles to confirm Christ's Messiahship—so the believer acknowledges God's hand in these credentials, and his veracity in sending Christ thus furnished to fulfil his ancient promises to his people.—See Doddridge.

CHAP. IV. 1—26.

CHRIST GOETH THROUGH SAMARIA—CONVERSETH WITH THE WOMAN AT THE WELL, AND SHOWETH WHO ARE TRUE WORSHIPPERS OF GOD.

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with *his* journey, sat thus on the well: *and* it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*.

THE story of the woman of Samaria is one of those favourite portions of scripture which calls for our admiration, by reason of its great simplicity. Would to God that the instruction which the narrative conveys were as universally felt! The rea-

son for our Lord's departure from Judea to pass into Galilee, was in order to avoid the rage of the Pharisees, to whom his popularity had rendered him offensive. He, therefore, passed through Samaria, which lay between these divisions of the Holy Land, and even there we find him: "going about doing good"—in fulfilling the great object of his mission, he sought out one of his lost sheep, which may explain, as well as the locality, the declaration of the chapter: "he *must needs* go through Samaria." We are taught by this removal, that a prudent attention to the safety of our lives, is not inconsistent with religious fidelity. We should not shrink from danger when we meet it in the path of duty, but in every other case, to hazard our lives is rashness and presumption.

Let us now go along with the Saviour upon this journey, and observe him, thirsty and weary, seated at the side of Jacob's well, thus proving that he was very man, partaker of our weaknesses, and subject to our wants and infirmities. Let us also learn a lesson from what follows, that even upon our journeys we should never lose sight of the spiritual improvement of those whom providence may place in our way. While our Lord was thus seated at the well, a woman came near to draw water, and he solicited her assistance to quench his thirst. This was not the whole of his intention—he chiefly used it as an introduction to his main design of speaking to her on the subject of religion, and thereby leading her to a saving knowledge of himself. The woman expressed her surprise at his address, since such violent prejudices subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, that they would neither ask nor receive any favours from each other. This arose from their being placed in the cities from which the ten tribes were led away captive.* The Samaritans found it expedient to have a form of religion like the Jews, and therefore sent for Jewish priests, and built a temple on Mount Gerizim, which proved that they were schismatics, and which produced a great division between them and the tribe of Judah, who retained the true worship of God at Jerusalem. Jesus, however, overlooking all narrow prejudices, told her that though she was unwilling to give him a cup of cold water because he was a Jew, yet he was willing to bestow the richest blessings on her, though a Samaritan. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

* See 2 Kings xvii. 24, 28.

What blessings do we lose by an ignorance of ourselves, and of him who speaks to us in his word! Jesus dwells on the "gift" or graciousness of God, that the woman might know that it was the only source of salvation; of this we are all ignorant by nature, but when we do know it, and that Saviour who is the pledge of the Father's love, then we ask of him and he bestows "living water"—his Holy Spirit, which quenches spiritual thirst, and which if we once taste, we shall thirst no more for the uncertain springs of earthly enjoyment. The pleasures of this life flow from a source which shall, ere long, be dried up. But the Christian's pleasure flows from a fountain that no time shall exhaust—the fountain of eternal, unchanging love. Whoso drinketh of this world's pleasure, shall thirst again; it can give no present enjoyment, nor prospect of future peace. But whoso drinketh of the water that Christ gives, shall *never* thirst. He shall have in this life joy unspeakable, and a certainty of future glory.

The woman, on hearing these words from our Lord, addressed him, saying, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." She knew not what he meant by "living water," and therefore, knew not what she asked for. *We*, however, know our Lord's meaning. The Spirit of God is that quickening refreshing stream, which springs up in the believer's heart, and never ceases to flow on even to eternity. Water, it is said, finds its own level—so here, the spirit comes down from the Father of light into the believer's heart, from whence it flows up to God again, until it places us near the very fountain-head itself. Are we individually disposed, and in real earnest, to make her prayer our own, and to say to the Saviour, "Give *me* this water that I thirst not?" Have we experienced the unsatisfying nature of this world's pleasure? Have we proved that its cisterns are broken—that its streams, though for a moment exhilarating, are afterwards bitter, nay poisonous? What a drudgery is the world's service! Happy, happy those, from whose hearts the delusive spell has been removed, and who have prayed for and obtained a draught of water from the well of life! None can plead excuse for not obtaining it, while this offer stands on record—"Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price."*

Our Lord having failed in creating a desire in this woman for

* Isaiah lv. 1.

spiritual things, at last awakened her to a sense of her sinful and dangerous state, by exposing some circumstances of her iniquitous conduct, which, however concealed from others, were accurately known to him. "Go call thy husband," said he, "and come hither." This was a startling command, and as it proved his knowledge of the adulterous commerce in which she then lived, was productive of the desired effect. She was instantly convinced, as if all her past offences were set in array before her. How shall unconverted sinners stand aghast, when their deeds of darkness are called up to view, and exposed before an assembled world! The woman, probably with a view of shifting off so disagreeable a subject as her own wickedness, while she acknowledged Jesus to be a prophet, requested information from him upon that debated point between the Jews and Samaritans, as to whether divine worship would be more acceptably performed on Mount Zion, or on Mount Gerizim. But our Lord soon undeceived her, as to her mistaken value of certain places; this might have been necessary in the Jewish dispensation, but not in the dispensation of the Spirit, when *all* nations are addressed, and all will be accepted when they come to him as they ought. "God is a Spirit"—therefore not confined to any locality, "and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The mere repetition of certain forms at certain times or places, will not avail with the heart-searching God. His worship must be the worship of the *heart*—it must be a spiritual service; but how can we offer up spiritual prayers without possessing the Spirit of God? Without it, we cannot be "born again;" without it we cannot understand the Bible, or have any lot in the matter, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of his*." *

The solemnity of our Lord's address could not but affect the mind of the woman, and immediately she was led to mention her expectation of the Messiah, the promised deliverer, and of the reformation which he would introduce; upon which our Lord made himself known to her, as the exalted personage she expected, saying, "I that speak unto thee am he." And did he ever finally leave any humble inquirer in suspense about his character as the Saviour? Does he not give all necessary information to every one who seeks it diligently? Our past lives will be no bar to his receiving us, if we go to him for strength to abandon sin. Sinners, if they continue such, God will

* Rom. viii. 9.

judge; but sinners when converted by his grace, are made sincere followers of Christ, and by virtue of his atonement, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.

NOTE on v. 9.—ᾗ γάρ συγχρῶνται—"have no dealings," or nothing in common—must be limited to acts of kindness, such as receiving of gifts—for v. 8, shews that the Jews might buy from the Samaritans. The tradition says—that they might also lodge in the Samaritan towns and even say Amen to their benedictions.—See Buxtorf, Lex. Tal. p. 1370.

CHAP. IV. 27—54.

THE DISCIPLES RETURN FROM THE CITY—CHRIST'S ZEAL FOR THE FATHER'S GLORY—THE SAMARITANS COME TO HIM FROM THE WOMAN'S REPORT—HE DEPARTETH INTO GALILEE AND HEALETH THE NOBLEMAN'S SON.

And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him. In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him *ought* to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours. And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he

went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told *him*, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he was come out of Judæa into Galilee.

Our Lord's conversation was interrupted by the return of his disciples, who, upon their approach, were astonished to find him in communication with the woman of Samaria, for they still retained their Jewish bigotry. Yet, suppressing their wonder, they came and besought him to take some necessary sustenance; but their wonder was still more excited when he spoke of having "meat to eat that they knew not of." Even the disciples were slow in their conception of spiritual things; therefore to make them comprehend his meaning, he declared it explicitly, "my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Foreseeing that he should have a multitude of converts among the Samaritans, he rejoiced, and called on them also to exult in the prospect; he encouraged them to labour in the work of the ministry, from the expectation of the abundant harvest which then presented itself. Alas! how few imitate the Saviour in this respect, that they esteem the words of his lips "more than their necessary food!" We could find many who injure their health, by not paying proper attention to their bodily wants, while intent upon worldly gain or worldly pleasure; but how few could we find, who allow their bodily wants to give place to the calls of religious exertion. Zeal, amounting to imprudence, is esteemed quite creditable in the world's service, but when even a less degree of zeal is exerted in the cause of Christ, it is regarded as mere enthusiasm. Oh! the forbearance of the Lord, in sparing, for such a length of time, a world so eager after its own advantage, and so little zealous to promote his glory! May the Lord raise up many more whose meat it will be to do his will, and to finish his work.

Much of our Lord's address to his disciples is particularly applicable to ministers of the Gospel, who are "labourers in God's husbandry," appointed by him to sow the seed for the approaching harvest. Though their utmost exertions cannot ensure success, still they must be diligent and unwearied in cultivating the field committed to their care, ever looking unto him "who giveth the increase." Nay, should no present fruit appear, it must not be concluded that all their pains have been in-

effectual. Others may "enter into their labours," and discover the benefit at some future time. The final harvest approaches, when they shall exult, not only in their own salvation, but in meeting those who through their ministry were rescued from sin and misery, and were conducted to eternal glory. Then, what anthems of praise— what grateful acclamations, will be heard from all believers, when "he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together!"

But to return to the woman of Samaria: the words of Jesus made a deep impression on her mind. Such was the height of her transport, that she forgot the trifling business on which she had come to the well, and left her water-pot behind. Filled with wonder and joy, and with an earnest concern for her friends and neighbours, she ran and proclaimed among the inhabitants of the city, that the Messiah had arrived, and invited them to accompany her to him, that they might be convinced for themselves. How important is the conversion of one sinner, especially as it may lead to that of many others. If you are acquainted with Jesus, you should recommend him to the notice and esteem of every one with whom you are connected. You should say to your friends, as Moses did to Hobab, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us and we will do thee good." * Perhaps they may (like the Samaritans of whom we read,) be influenced by your report, to search and examine; and having proved part of your statement to be true, may be inclined, like these persons also, to pray of the Saviour to abide with them.

We should now enquire seriously whether we have yet manfested the same eagerness which the Samaritans did, to cultivate an acquaintance with Jesus? He now draws near to us in his word, and by the ministry of his servants in the Gospel; but have we entreated his presence and continuance? Many have borne witness concerning him, and, like the woman, have invited us to come and see for ourselves: have we credited their report? Or on what testimony is our faith built? Does it rest entirely on the accounts of others, without any particular application to ourselves? Or have we so accredited the word and so experienced the power and grace of Jesus, that we can say, with the Samaritans, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." We can have no

* Numb. x. 29.

saving knowledge of Christ, unless the testimony of God is confirmed by our individual experience.

Our Lord having passed on to Galilee, was visited by a nobleman in behalf of his sick son. Earthly greatness is no defence against afflictions. Happy was it for this nobleman that his son was sick, else he would not have gone to Jesus. Why does God send us pain, losses, and afflictions, but that they may lead us to an acquaintance with himself, while we are driven to him for relief? Are *we* afflicted? Let us apply to Jesus, the omnipotent physician, who can effectually heal us.

This nobleman appears to have been in earnest, but weak in faith If he had not had confidence in the power of Jesus, he would not have sought his mercy,—but he seems to have laid too great a stress on his "coming down" to his son, instead of depending on his almighty word. How much difference was there between the centurion and this nobleman! The former pleaded for his servant—the latter for his son. The one said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."* The other insisted on his going to his house, "Come down ere my child die." Our Lord rebukes him for his unbelief,† but he feels it not; all his mind is on his dying son. Oh! the meekness and mercy of this Lamb of God! when we should have expected him to punish this suppliant for want of greater faith, we find him strengthening the little that he possessed. "Go thy way," says he, "thy son liveth." The nobleman, crediting what was said, departed; and now the news of his son's recovery meets him on the road. Thus with one word did Jesus heal two patients—the father, and the son: the son, of a fever—the father, of unbelief. He had believed a little when he came to Christ, and more when he went away, but his faith was confirmed before he reached home: and then this faith spread among his family—"himself believed *and his whole house*." Well might this nobleman say, "it was good for me to have been afflicted;" and if we turn to Christ in our afflictions, the same blessed effects will follow. It will lead us and our families to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

* Matt. viii. 8. † See v. 48.

CHAP. V. 1—23.

JESUS AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA—HE HEALETH HIM THAT WAS DISEASED EIGHT AND THIRTY YEARS—THE JEWS CAVIL—BUT CHRIST ASSERTS HIS DIVINITY.

After this there was a feast of the Jews: and Jesus went up to Jerusalem; Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-*market* a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath-day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath-day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth *them;* even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

It is generally supposed that our Lord celebrated three passovers during his public ministry, and that the circumstance related in this chapter occurred at the second.* At the celebration of

* Though ἑορτὴ—"feast"—is without an article, it is evident that the passover

that great festival, he was more frequently present than at any other of the Jewish feasts, as if to show that the paschal lamb was the most striking type of his work of atoning suffering. He was indeed constant in his attendance at the temple, when in Jerusalem; and his example teaches us not to slight or neglect the ordinances of God, since he who could not stand in need of them as we do, put such honour upon them.

His first act, that we hear of, after his arrival at Jerusalem, was to visit the abode of misery and distress. He went to the pool of Bethesda. Nothing else is recorded in Scripture concerning this pool but what we read in this place. We gather from the narrative, that in order to preserve a token of God's regard for Israel, and that he would visit them again in mercy, he was pleased to send an angel, from time to time, to excite a visible and extraordinary commotion in the pool, and there to perform a miracle; for it was found by experience that the person who first bathed in it after the troubling of the water, was cured of whatever disease he had. Around this pool were five porches, within which were collected crowds of melancholy sufferers. "The impotent, blind, halt and withered" patients, here sat in mournful assembly. Among these children of sorrow, Jesus singled out one whose case he knew to be of lengthened suffering, and whom he determined to make a monument of his healing power. He said to him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" to which the man replied, that his infirmity was such as to prevent his availing himself of the miraculous virtue which the pool afforded, and that he had no one to assist him. Poor sufferer! he is now in a fair way of being healed of his disease, for there is one standing beside him, both able and willing to assist him! Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk: and immediately the man was made whole." Here was more than angel's power—power independent of time, and place, and means. He spake, and it was done. Oh! all ye that are spiritually sick and diseased, come to the blood of Jesus!—this is the true Bethesda—the house of mercy—as the word means—and here, blessed be God, there is "a fountain for sin and uncleanness!" Do ye complain of the blindness of ignorance? here ye shall receive clearness of sight: of the distemper of passion? here is strength to overcome it: of the decay of spiritual affections?

is intended; four such occurred in our Lord's three years' ministry. John ii. 13; v. 1; vi. 4. (which he did not attend) and xii. 1. He was also present once at the feast of tabernacles, John vii. 2. and once at a feast of dedication; John x. 22, 23. See Greswell's Disser. viii part. i. vol. ii.

here is life and vigour to revive them: whatsoever your infirmity be, come to the pool of Bethesda, and be healed.

We may also look on the pool of Bethesda as an illustration of the sanctuary of God—there the ordinances of his appointment are administered, and there the Gospel of peace is not only preached, but applied to the cure of sin-sick souls—it is indeed a "house of mercy." Thither should the afflicted go, for Jesus is to be met in his house of prayer. There too, like the sufferers we read of, we must wait the Lord's leisure—we must wait till his Spirit troubles the waters.

We may picture to ourselves the scene of Bethesda—what anxious hope filled every breast—what watchful expectation. Behold these cripples, looking enviously upon one another—each thinking the other an obstacle in his way—each watching to get before the other—each hoping to be first; like emulous courtiers that vie for the next preferment, and think it a pain to hope, and a torment to be disappointed. Thus did these cripples act, and all this waiting, and all this endurance, was to procure relief from bodily suffering. What toil do people undergo for a little more life, in which they must toil still longer! What certain pains do they endure, for a few uncertain days of life! Why shall we not do as much for our soul's sake. Are we thus anxious for spiritual health? Are we waiting at Bethesda's pool? Have we gone to the fountain which cleanseth from all sin? We shall read this chapter without profit, if it does not induce us to make application to the Saviour.

For this compassionate act, Jesus was called to account by the superstitious Pharisees, who objected to the miracle because it had been performed, and because the man had carried away his couch, on the Sabbath day. Thus the Saviour stood arraigned as a criminal before the bar of his sinful creatures—a sight, worthy of angel's wonder, that God's own Son should stoop so low; but love to fallen man was the motive for his condescension. Still, though his glory was veiled by his humanity, he spoke, upon his defence, as the sovereign Lord of all, possessing full power to condemn and destroy his accusers. With an inexpressible dignity he declared, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work:" as if he had said, "My Father is continually carrying on his works of providence, and ceaseth not on the sabbath-days from exercising his almighty power for the support of the creation; and I, likewise, maintain the same dominion, and act in the same absolute manner." This being

the import of his words, it was no wonder that the Jews, who denied his divinity, considered him as a blasphemer, in making himself "equal with God." Had the Jews mistaken his words, and drawn a wrong conclusion from them, (as they certainly did, if he be not very God,) he would instantly have corrected their error; but he not only admitted that he was "equal with God," but followed up the view which they had taken, by asserting, in unequivocal language, his claims to divinity. He proceeded to declare that "what things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise;" and then declared, that in two particular instances, his dignity as the Son of God would be manifested, to their astonishment and confusion. The one was, his restoring of life to the dead; even now he quickens whom he will, by raising up those "dead in sin" to newness of life *—as hereafter he will be the author of the general resurrection. The other was, the administration of the final judgment, which is committed to him, and which he will assign and pronounce upon the whole human race. Are these such works as a creature can perform? or do they not evidently require the exertion of Almighty power? Jesus therefore added, that by these acts God would assert and vindicate the dignity of his co-equal Son, and that he required the same worship for the Son, as was paid to himself—the Father. Of what sort, then, is their religion who would reduce the Saviour to the nature of a mere creature? With all their pretence of veneration for the Father, they are here declared to be his enemies. Take from Jesus his deity, and what becomes of man? He is left to utter and unavoidable perdition. He is a transgressor against the law of God, and he has no one that can undertake his cause. He is a rebel against the Most High, without any one to plead his pardon, or procure his peace. Oh! what a comfortless religion is that which robs the Saviour of his glory, and the sinner of his only hope of salvation! Far be this from us who take the simple word of God for our guide. "All power is given unto Jesus in heaven and n earth." Let "us honour HIM, even as we honour the Father."

NOTE 1, v. 2.—ἐπὶ τῇ προβατικῇ—"at the sheep,"—that we are to understand "gate" and not "market," (as in text) is evident from Neh. iii. 1. Maundrel, in his travels, thinks that he saw the remains near what is now called St. Stephen's gate.—See Elsley's Annotations on the whole subject.

NOTE 2, v. 18 might be rendered more emphatically—'By calling God his own proper Father, he equalled himself with God.' So the Jews understood our Lord's words, and so Christ continued to affirm. * See Eph. ii. 1.

CHAP. V. 24—47.

CHRIST ASSERTS HIS DIVINITY, BY REFERENCE TO JOHN'S TESTIMONY, TO HIS MIRACLES AND TO THE SCRIPTURES.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself: And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man; but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than *that* of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is *one* that accuseth you, *even* Moses in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

At the close of our last lecture we left the Saviour standing before his Jewish accusers, vindicating his conduct in healing upon the Sabbath-day, by arguments drawn from his divinity: in proof of which he appealed to his power of raising the dead, and to the fact, that all judgment was committed into his hands by the Father. The remainder of this chapter is replete with arguments upon this important doctrine, which has been so much attacked by Satan, and cavilled at by proud man; we should therefore thank God for the light here shed on this vital truth.

The Lord Jesus, in the most solemn manner, demanded the attention of the Jews while he spoke; but before he proceeded to give further evidence upon the question, he again laid claim to the title which he was about to prove, and asserted that he was the source of spiritual life, by whom sinners, dead in sins, might be regenerated; in order also to fix a deeper impression on their minds, he set before them the awful proceedings of the last day, when they should hear his voice awakening them from their graves, and should stand at his bar, to receive their final sentence from his mouth. True it is that Jesus says, "I can of mine own self do nothing;" and again, "The Son can do nothing of himself." These words are indeed applicable to his mediatorial office, in which he was professedly subject to the Father, but they also bear an internal assertion of his divinity; as if he had said, "I can have no distinct plan of my own, nor act separately from the Father—such an essential union is there between us."

Jesus, however, did not rest the matter upon his own mere assertion, but showed, by a variety of arguments, that he was "very God of very God." First—he appealed to the testimony of John the Baptist, who had seen the Spirit of God descending in an open manner upon him, and had heard a voice from heaven affirming his high character.* To him they had once appeared to pay attention, and "were willing, for a season to abide in his light;" they had even sent a deputation to consult him upon this subject, and yet they would not abide by his decision. John therefore, was a witness against the Jews, in favour of Christ's divinity. Secondly, he referred them to his miracles, which, if not denied, and until they were disproved, were still stronger evidence in his favour. Thirdly, he appealed to the express and immediate word of God, which, in an audible tone at his baptism, declared him to be the "beloved Son." If this were evidence to the Jews at that time, *our* evidence now is twofold more, for that voice was, afterwards, twice repeated.† Fourthly—he directed them to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures. These were the writings of the Old Testament, which they all acknowledged and professed to receive with the highest regard. To these divine oracles he solemnly appealed in vindication of his claims; for so expressly did the types, promises, and prophecies declare the deity of the expected Messiah, and so clearly were all fulfilled in him, that unless the Jews rejected all just evidence,

* See Matt. iii. 16, 17. † Matt. xvii. 5. John xii. 28.

and wilfully closed their eyes against it, they could not but acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah—the Son of God.

But our Lord was not content with mere argument—he endeavoured to alarm the consciences of his accusers. He attempted to arouse them from their delusion, and to work upon their hearts, by a plain and faithful representation of the nature, malignity, and danger, of their sin. His knowledge of their thoughts and motives, enabled him to say, "I know you that ye have not the love of God in you"—by which he both proved his omniscience and detected their hypocrisy—that notwithstanding professions of love to God, their hearts were not under the influence of divine love. He warned them, finally, that Moses, the great founder of their religion, to whom they professed a willing submission, would appear as their accuser before God. Moses had written much concerning the Redeemer, and had represented his office, work, and character, by various rites and ceremonies: an unfeigned attention to these ancient records would have led to their acknowledgment of Jesus, as the Saviour in whom these types and prophecies were fulfilled. Such was our Lord's powerful vindication of his claims to divinity; what was the effect produced upon his accusers, we hear not; but we are led to imagine, that they were restrained by an awful impression on their minds, from proceeding to that act of violence which they meditated.*

We may confidently support our evidence for Christ's divinity, upon the arguments contained in this chapter, and if, after reading it, any one refuses to honour him, even as he would the Father, it must be because he discredits the Bible, and does not receive it as the word of God. Yet let us remember that this is not enough—we must practically feel the power of it in our own experience. Many there have been whose belief upon this point was perfectly sound, and who could maintain it against the power of its adversaries, who yet gave melancholy proof that they were still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Such wisdom is merely human, but "the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable; gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy;"† and without that spiritual wisdom which teaches us to know ourselves, and to see and to value the Saviour, we never can be saved: we should never rest upon any evidence of the Saviour's divinity short of that internal

* See v. 16, 18. † James iii. 17.

evidence which his quickening and regenerating Spirit supplies. We shall thus be enabled to say, "Now we believe, for we have seen him ourselves, and *know*, that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

CHAP. VI. 1—21.

MIRACLE OF THE MULTIPLIED LOAVES AND FISHES—MODERATION ENFORCED—GOD THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR SUPPLIES—CHRIST WALKETH ON THE SEA TO HIS DISCIPLES.

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered *them* together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was *now* come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

THE miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes having been noticed already,* need only be considered now with a view to our practical instruction. Our Lord, we read, crossed the sea

* See Comments on Matt. xiv. and Luke ix. 13, 17.

of Tiberias, for the purpose of retirement with his disciples, (v. 3,); but that retirement was soon interrupted by the multitude who followed him in consequence of the miracles which they had seen him perform.

Christ proceeded to feast this great multitude. We never find that he entertained any guests but twice, and then, only with loaves and fishes. He was sometimes feasted by others more liberally; but his domestic fare, how simple, how homely was it! These loaves and fishes were provision for himself and his disciples. We should remember that the end of food is to sustain nature, and not to pamper our palates. Meat was ordained for the body—the body for the soul—and all for God: we should look through all the subordinate ends, to the highest. To rest in the mere pleasure of eating, is for those creatures who have no souls. Oh! the exquisite luxury of these times in which we live! what a concourse of curious dishes do we find, from the farthest seas, and lands, to make up one hour's meal! what profuse expense is thus lavished! what waste of our master's goods! To say the least, what extreme of selfishness is it to squander money on a variety of dishes which tempt persons to eat more than nature requires, while numbers around are starving, and while hundreds could be fed for the cost of that which merely gratifies the palate! Is this not sinful? Are we who practise such things, the disciples of him who was satisfied with the loaves and fishes? Are we not rather, in an unrenewed nature, the children of those first parents who destroyed themselves by indulging a sinful appetite? *

Jesus both gave thanks and broke the bread before he multiplied it; thereby teaching us that his blessing is essential to all our doings and enjoyments, and that we should expect it more in the distribution of our goods than in keeping them entire for selfish purposes. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth: and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." † It is the grain thrown into the ground, which yields an increase to the husbandman, while that which is tied in the sack, or heaped in the granary, decreases by keeping. "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself."

We are, further, reminded by this miracle, of the source from whence our continual provision flows. If the disciples were fed by the loaves multiplied, and we by the grain multiplied, it

* See Bishop Hall's Contemplations, book iv. cont. 5. † Prov. xi. 24.

is the act of the same Almighty power. What is this but a perpetual miracle which God works for our preservation? The corn could no more grow and multiply without the Lord's power, than the loaves could: but ungrateful man sows, and reaps, and grinds, and eats, as a matter of course, without reflecting that each grain that is sown must first receive a blessing from the Lord, before it is multiplied for his use.

The multitude which followed Jesus, when they were hungry, would not now leave him when they were fed, and in their desire to extol his praise, were about to heap upon him more honour than he wished to receive: they were coming, by force, to make him a king; on which account he withdrew to a mountain, privately. St. Matthew, when relating this circumstance, adds, that before his retirement he constrained his disciples to leave him, and "to get into a ship." * It appears that they waited till evening, still hoping that their Master might join them before they sailed, and unwilling to stir without him: but he came not, so they obeyed, and departed. All things now seemed conspiring to distress these poor disciples. The night was dark—the wind was high and contrary—the sea was boisterous—and their Master absent, which last was the chief of their misfortunes. What a picture, this, of that state of desertion to which the child of God is often reduced. "Behold, I go forward," he will say, "but he is not there—and backward, but I cannot perceive him." † Yet, even in this state, we shall see that believers have no real ground of apprehension, for He who sends the storm, will support them while it lasts, and bring them through in safety.

While Jesus was praying upon the mount, his disciples were not forgotten by him: his eye followed them and noticed their distress. That all-seeing eye has no limits, and therefore the distress of his followers is ever closely observed. From the height of his glory, he beholds his servants tossed upon the unquiet sea of this world, and beaten with the waves and billows of affliction. Jesus foresaw the toil and danger which his disciples should encounter, ere he sent them away; yet he purposely commanded them to go. He who could prevent our sufferings by his power, yet, in wisdom, permits them; that his mercy may be glorified in our deliverance, and that our faith may be strengthened by the issue of our distress. 'Twas near the morning's dawn, ere Jesus came to his disciples; he thereby exercised their patience, and accustomed them to wait upon his

* Matt. xiv. 22. † Job xxiii. 8.

providence. Thus does he act even now. Storms and billows often threaten our frail bark: the night, and his absence, heighten our distress: let us hold out patiently till the fourth watch, and he will surely come and rescue us.

Jesus came to his disciples at last, yet so as that there was more dread than joy in his presence. He came walking upon the sea, and they were affrighted, thinking, (as we are told elsewhere,) that they saw a spirit. Had it been a good spirit, they need not fear—had it even been an evil one, they ought to have remembered that the devils were not only subject to their Saviour, but subject to themselves through his word.* And are devils, when seen, more powerful than when invisible? Surely not. Little do men think of the power which Satan's emissaries are exerting every moment, to tempt them into sin, and to draw them into perdition; but they fear them not, because they see them not. *They* have reason to fear, who have not taken shelter in Jesus; but the Christian who clings to his Saviour need *never* fear, let what will happen. He is not only defended by the invisible host of ministering spirits,† but the Saviour is always near at hand, and those gracious words, "It is I," are sufficient to cheer the most fearful and drooping, and to give comfort in the darkest night of sorrow and distress.

CHAP. VI. 22—51.

THE MULTITUDE FOLLOW JESUS—HE REPROVETH THEIR WORLDLY MOTIVES—CHRIST THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN—THE JEWS CAVIL AT THIS—DIVINE TEACHING EFFECTUAL.

The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but *that* his disciples were gone away alone; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto

* Luke x. 17. † See Heb. i. 14.

him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

THE multitude who had been desirous that Jesus should assume the government, and from whom he had withdrawn in consequence, sought after him again with renewed ardour. They had travelled far on foot, and then crossed the lake in search of him. At length they found him at Capernaum, and expressed their surprise at his removal to that place, which they could not account for, as he could not have been there within the time, except by crossing the lake, and this they felt sure he had not done, as they knew he did not sail with his disciples, and they also knew that there had been there no other boat to take him. They little imagined that he was Lord of earth and sea, and that as the waves had obeyed when he commanded them to be peaceful, so at his command they had laid aside their yielding

nature, and formed themselves into a firm causeway to support his steps.

The apparent zeal of these Jews in searching after Jesus, would have imposed on a mortal, like themselves, and gained for them the praise of devoted followers. But no secret of the heart lies so deep as to escape the all-seeing eye of Jesus: he immediately detected their motives and said, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." No purer motives influenced their zeal, than that of still hoping to make him king, and to gain something for themselves by his advancement, which they thought their forwardness in his cause would ensure them. But when our Lord blasted their hopes of temporal gain, by entreating them to turn their attention from their perishable body to the wants of their immortal soul, and when he asserted the necessity of believing on him, as the Saviour, they insolently demanded a sign in proof of his divine mission—"What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee; what dost thou work?" Could it be credited, that they who had just been so miraculously fed, should immediately ask for further evidence! They laboured hard to follow him, whilst they hoped for temporal gain by their adherence to him: but no sooner did they find that his chief concern was about their souls, than they denied that to be a miracle, which had but a few hours before excited their unbounded admiration. What a picture of the carnal heart do these Jews present! the world, their all; the soul, overlooked.

They now attempt to argue with the Saviour, and intimate that his miracles were far inferior to those of Moses, who had fully proved his divine mission, by supporting their ancestors in the wilderness with manna from heaven. To this our Lord replied, that there was bread then offered to them infinitely more excellent than that which Moses had been the means of communicating, and that this heavenly food was no other than the gracious offers of eternal life, which proceeded from the lips of him who spoke to them. This declaration seemed to impress the minds of some who heard it, and without knowing, perhaps, the full import of their own words, they cried out—"Lord, evermore give us this bread!" There cannot be a more suitable petition to offer up than this. Who, amongst us, is not anxious to preserve life? Who is not labouring, in some way or other, for the support of a perishable body? Do we take as much pains to procure spiritual food? Are we so impressed with the value of our souls, as to prefer spiritual instruction to any honour that the

world could bestow on us; and are we acting in accordance with that choice? Our sincerity on that point will be a test of our Christianity.

Jesus having spoken of himself as "the bread that cometh down from heaven," and having stated the benefits to be derived from faith in him, the Jews, who supposed him to be no more than the Son of Joseph, his reputed father, began to cavil at his expressions. Our Lord, however, repeated still more earnestly, that he himself was that spiritual food, on the receiving of which, salvation depended, and that whoever did partake of that spiritual food, should, undoubtedly, be saved. Still he observed that many of those who then heard him, rejected his gracious offer. And is it not so at present? Do not the majority of the world live without this spiritual feeding upon Christ? How is this to be accounted for? The word of God supplies us with the reason—man is by nature "dead in trespasses and sins,"—he has no spiritual life, and, therefore, no appetite for heavenly things—he loves this present evil world, and feels unwilling to come to Christ for eternal things, or to submit to his easy yoke; he dreads the restraints which vital religion would place upon him, and only seeks to gratify the selfish and corrupt desires of his nature. If therefore left to himself, he will not seek for God's favour, or value his proffered mercy. The words of our Lord are proved to be true by every day's experience, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." He *cannot* come, because he *will* not—his hatred of the truth, and his love of sin, keep him in the chains of Satan, and lead him to avoid the narrow way. This may suffice to show us the absolute need of divine teaching; without it we can know nothing spiritual, as we ought—without it we shall never come to Christ for the supply of our wants and the salvation of our souls.

Let us now remark the efficacy of divine teaching—"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." God has secured a people for himself by fixing on them his everlasting love; in the covenant of grace he gave them to the Son, as his portion and property, and hence their names were written in the Lamb's book of life, before the foundation of the world. They in their different generations are "called according to God's purpose, by his Spirit working in due season. They, through grace, obey the calling, they be justified freely—they be made sons of God by adoption—they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ—they walk religiously in good

works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." * Such are the blessed effects of divine teaching, in which all of us should feel most anxious to participate. If such be our desire, and if the salvation of the soul be the first thing with us, how comfortable will Christ's assurance be to us—"Him that cometh to me, I will *in no wise* cast out,"—there is no refusal here—none sent empty away—a full welcome awaits every soul that draws nigh to Jesus in faith—all is ours—pardon, peace, holiness, and glory; if we only fly to his perfect salvation. Do not these promises encourage you to come to Christ? Do not these assurances satisfy you? His invitation is sent freely to all, and all who desire his blessing are exhorted to receive the same. His hand is stretched out to communicate the grace we need, and his bowels yearn with compassion towards every supplicant who is humbled at his feet; let us then draw near to him, and practically bring to the test the blessed words that we have heard: "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

NOTE on v. 44—Augustine says, 'This is the doctrine of grace—none cometh except he be drawn. But whom the Father draws, and whom not, and why he draw one and not another, presume not to decide, if thou wouldest avoid falling into error. Take the doctrine as it is given to thee.'

CHAP. VI. 52—71.

ON EATING THE FLESH OF CHRIST—UNION WITH CHRIST—JUDAS'S TREACHERY FORETOLD.

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *his* flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? *What* and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing:

* Article xvii.

the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot *the son* of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

In the preceding part of this chapter, our Lord had declared that he was "the bread of life," and that whosoever ate of that bread should live for ever. Declarations so strong, and so mysterious, exceedingly puzzled the Jews, and they began to dispute with each other concerning them. They could not understand what Jesus meant by giving them his flesh to eat: their minds were darkened, and as they had just before mistaken the nature of his kingdom, supposing is to be earthly instead of spiritual, so they mistook the meaning of his words, and put a carnal construction upon that which was intended to be applied spiritually. Jesus, however, without deigning to answer every cavil which proud objectors might make, proceeded to enforce what he had said, by still stronger declarations, affirming that "except they ate his flesh, and drank his blood, they had no life in them;" and that whosoever did eat his flesh, and drink his blood, should have eternal life. By our Lord's own explanation of these words in the 63rd verse, we learn that he wished to direct them to that spiritual sustenance which believers receive from him. Christ gave up his body to death, and consented to shed his blood, in order to atone for the sins of mankind, and all who depend on that atonement by faith, are partakers of its inestimable benefits. As the common food of our bodies must be received, that it may afford us necessary sustenance, so we must apply for, and be partakers of, the atonement which his death has purchased, before our souls are nourished or benefited by what Jesus has done. The Lord Jesus has made a full propitiation for sin, by "giving his flesh for the life of the world;" and when faith receives him, as set forth in the word, "his flesh and blood" will be the very food of the soul; in other words, the great truths of Christ's incarnation and blood-shedding, will be the source of peace within, and the constant subject of meditation. In this respect, we consider the Christian

as possessed of a new nature, which requires suitable nourishment. The natural man feeds on vanity, the spiritual man must have better things—he therefore "feeds on Christ in his heart by faith with thanksgiving." He is joined to Christ by a mysterious and inseparable union, by virtue of which his soul is sustained and nourished through the constant communication of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine is as unintelligible to the generality of the world, as the words of Christ were to the Jews. They understood not his meaning, neither can any of us understand it, until we are made to feel it by experience, and to enjoy its comforts. Our minds must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to know and feel these truths; and until we are thus enlightened, and until our own experience and enjoyment teach us what it is thus to feed upon Christ, we have no life in us: we may have "a name to live," but we are spiritually dead.

Jesus is here exhibited to us as the heavenly manna—"the bread of life"—the food for our souls: are we daily feeding upon him by faith? He condescended to be made "partaker of flesh and blood," that, dying in our nature, he might expiate our guilt: have we applied for an interest in his atoning sacrifice? It is declared here that without an intimate union with Christ, by faith, we are considered by God to be in spiritual death: are we united to Christ by faith, and are we daily drawing nourishment from him for our souls? Great and blessed are the effects of this union with Christ: can we testify to the truth of it by our own experience? Are we sensible of any communion between Jesus and our own souls? Do we derive from him refreshment when we are weary—strength when we are weak—and comfort when we are oppressed with trouble?

This chapter has been lamentably misapplied by the Church of Rome, to support the anti-scriptural doctrine of transubstantiation, or the change of the sacramental bread and wine into the *literal* body and blood of Christ. It will therefore be needful to point out some simple arguments, drawn from the chapter itself, to disprove its application to that subject. First, this conversation of our Lord's was held *above a year before the* sacrament of the Eucharist was instituted; and although many of the expressions in it may be *accommodated* to that sacrament, and by anticipation, might have been intended by Christ to refer to it, yet it was not intended as a description of that sacrament—many of Christ's hearers might have died before its actual institution—if we confine "the eating of the flesh" to that ordinance, then they could not have eaten, and Christ would have expected

an impossibility; but if we take the words spiritually, it will be true in their case, as in others, that they must have fed on Christ by faith, or perish. Secondly, our Lord says, of the bread of which he speaks, that whosoever eats of it shall have eternal life: (verses 50, 51.) Will any one say that every person who eats the bread in the Sacrament shall have everlasting life? * Judas ate of it, yet Judas was lost; and hence our Lord's words cannot be taken literally, but spiritually. Thirdly, because our Lord in two places distinctly gives a spiritual, not a literal, interpretation to the chapter, saying, (v. 35,) "I am the bread of life; he that *cometh to me* shall never hunger, and he that *believeth on me*, shall never thirst;" thereby explaining the eating and drinking spoken of, as *coming to him*, and *believing in him*. And again, (v. 63,) "The words that I speak unto you, they are *spirit* and they are *life*." These words may suffice to show our Lord's meaning—they are a key to the whole chapter, and forbid anything like a carnal view of it. If the bread be changed into the *real* flesh of Christ, every one by going to the Sacrament must eat it and live; but if his words are *spirit* and *life*, we require *faith* and *love* before we can enter into them, and live on them daily. Our Lord's concluding question, and the Apostle's answer, confirm the view, that the spiritual feeding of faith is intended, and not the receiving the literal flesh and blood of Christ. When he observed that some were offended at his words, the Redeemer puts the touching question to the apostles, "Will ye also go away?" and Peter answering, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the *words* of eternal life." Peter and the apostles evidently understood our Lord to have spoken *spiritually*—not *literally*. We then, who give a spiritual meaning to this chapter, agree in opinion with St. Peter and the apostles, and we remain with them, and with Jesus; while those who take the words of this chapter literally, as the Jews mistook them, must, with them, depart from Christ.

The traitorous conduct of Judas is here foretold by our Lord, as a reason why his faithful disciples should cling to him closer. Happy those who are preserved unshaken in the midst of apostacies! What then is your attachment to Jesus? "Will ye also go away?" If you depart from Christ, to whom can you go? Is there any other refuge? Are "the words of eternal

* To remain in Christ and to have him remaining in us, is to eat his flesh and drink his blood, so that he which is not in Christ, though with his teeth he teareth the sacrament carnally and visibly, yet he doth not feed spiritually upon his flesh and blood.—*Augustine.*

life" to be found elsewhere? Do not then "draw back to perdition," but, "with purpose of heart, cleave unto the Lord."

NOTE.—It has been often objected that the Catechism of the Church of England teaches the doctrine of the *real* presence in the Lord's Supper, because it states that "the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in it." We reply, that the *real* presence is what we should desire and what the Lord's Supper does communicate, when received in faith; the Catechism teaches—that only the *faithful* feed on Christ as the bread of life—whereas the Church of Rome must hold that all communicants receive the literal flesh and blood of Christ. And the 28th Article shews that "the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an *heavenly* and *spiritual* manner," in opposition to transubstantiation, which it strongly condemns.

CHAP. VII. 1—24.

JESUS REPROVETH HIS OWN KINSMEN—WHY HE DID NOT GO UP TO JERUSALEM WITH THEM—HE ATTENDS THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES—AND TEACHETH THE PEOPLE.

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For *there is* no man *that* doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him. Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come. When he had said these words unto them, he abode *still* in Galilee. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him. for fear of the Jews. Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knowest this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. Did not Moses give you the law, and *yet* none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath-day circumcise a man. If a man on the sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

THE same prudent attention to personal safety which marked our Lord's conduct on a former occasion, is here observable again. He remained in Galilee, "for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him." His time was not come, and therefore, it was his duty, (as it should be ours) not needlessly to expose himself to danger. The inhabitants of those parts where he sojourned so long, ought to have valued the great privilege of his presence; but this was not the case—they were ignorant of their blessed opportunities, for their minds were blinded, and even his own near relatives were so opposed to him, that they joined the popular cry, and urged him to take the opportunity of the approaching festival for displaying his works at Jerusalem. This they said in a taunting manner, meaning to insinuate that he courted popularity, and aimed at nothing more than public applause, and that with this object, he could succeed better at Jerusalem than in the obscure parts of Galilee. There were unbelievers, we see, even among the kindred of Jesus, and probably in the same house with him, who, though witnesses of his exemplary holiness, yet derided and rejected him. We learn from this, that example, however eminent, will not, of itself, prevail to overcome the natural enmity of the heart to religion: this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and nothing else can effect it. Consolation is here furnished for those persons who, on account of their attachment to Jesus, are exposed to the opposition of their family and friends. Let such rejoice that they are counted worthy to tread in the steps of their blessed Master; and let those who oppose the spread of vital religion among the members of their family, calmly reflect upon the consequences of being "found fighting against God." They *are* fighting against him if they endeavour to extinguish that spark of grace which his Spirit has lighted in others.

Our Lord exhibits an example of meekness, by the reply which he made to the unkind insinuation of his brethren. He mildly answered, that the reason of his not going to Jerusalem was, because his open reproval of sin had so much excited the rage of his enemies, as to endanger his life; but, he further remarked, that this reason need not detain them, since their conduct was so agreeable to the spirit of the world, as to excite neither rebuke nor resentment. We cannot conceive a more decided proof of a carnal state, than when it may be said of any, as it was of Christ's kinsmen—"The world cannot hate you"—the reverse of which will be the case, if we are faithful to our Master. The sincere Christian, no less than the faithful minister, is called

on to bear testimony against the world, that its deeds are evil, and this must be not merely the testimony of the lip, but that of uncompromising and consistent conduct. It matters not how much religion a person may *profess*, except his life and conversation are decidedly holy. When truth is thus stamped with consistency, the enmity of the world will be at once excited, because their conduct is practically reproved. If we are Christians, the ungodly world will dislike us; and it is better to incur the world's hatred by testifying against its wickedness, than gain its good will by going down the stream with it. St. Paul says, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ:"* and St. James says, "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." †

Our Lord did not go up to the feast of tabernacles with his brethren, but followed them privately after some days. Had he neglected this service, he would have been censured as a despiser of religion, for there was an universal expectation of him at the festival, and the Jews debated upon his character, some allowing his integrity—others condemning him as a deceiver—but some daring to avow their attachment to him. In what thraldom are those persons held who are courting the friendship of the world! Oh, slaves to an ideal power! We dread a shadow; for what is the world's power when weighed in the balance with God's omnipotence, which is pledged to support us, if we are bold to confess our attachment to him! ‡

About the middle of the feast Jesus appeared in the temple, and delivered his instructions with such unshaken firmness in the midst of his enemies, and, at the same time, with such astonishing power, that the Jews were unable to reconcile such wisdom of speech with the meanness of his education. But he proceeded to declare that he was invested with a commission from heaven, and that his doctrine was not the fruit of human learning, but a direct revelation from God. He observed, that the evidence he adduced, was such as should convince any honest inquirer, and then made use of these remarkable words: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself:" which we may thus paraphrase—"If any man be a true servant of God, and follow his will, he shall experimentally know of the doctrine, and thus have an internal evidence of the truth of it, such as no outward argument could ever afford." This is a practical way of

* Gal. i. 10. † James iv. 4. ‡ Isaiah li. 12, 13.

testing the truth of the Bible, which the humblest Christian can enter into—he knows its power to relieve his oppressed conscience by the freeness of its promises—he has felt its holy rebukes and admonitions when inclined to wander—its consolations in sorrow, and its power in temptation; and thus he has proved the excellency of God's word in the time of greatest need. The Christian, therefore, enjoys an evidence in his own experience, to which all others are strangers.

Jesus, by a bold appeal, accused his hearers of transgressing the law of which they boasted: some he even charged with designs of violence against his person. They denied the imputation, and reviled him for it, as if he were possessed by a devil. He, however, continued to assert that their persecution was most unreasonable; for in healing the impotent man upon the Sabbath day, he had done no worse crime than they themselves, who, upon that day, (if it happened to be the eighth after an infant's birth) performed the rite of circumcision, out of regard to Moses, who enjoined its continuance, though he was not its original founder. God was the founder of the institution, and Abraham had observed it four hundred years before Moses.* He then urged them to form a just and impartial judgment concerning him. Christ and his doctrine require nothing more than "righteous judgment," to be convinced of their value. There is not that most bitter enemy of the Gospel, who, if he could lay aside his natural prejudices, and come to the investigation with an unbiassed mind, but would soon confess that "this is, of a truth, that Prophet that should come into the world."

CHAP. VII. 25—53.

CHRIST ANSWERETH THE JEWS' OBJECTIONS—DIVERS OPINIONS OF HIM AMONG THE PEOPLE—HIS ADDRESS ON THE LAST DAY OF THE FEAST—NICODEMUS AND OTHERS TAKE HIS PART.

Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is. Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from

* See Gen. xvii. 10, 11, 23.

him, and he hath sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this *man* hath done? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and *then* I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find *me:* and where I am, *thither* ye cannot come. Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What *manner of* saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find *me:* and where I am, *thither* ye cannot come? In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given;* because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) Many of the people therefore when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge *any* man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. And every man went unto his own house.

THE mild conduct of our Lord while addressing those who were even in hostility to him, could not but strike some of the Jews who were present, with wonder and admiration. Yet here, again, we see what fatal influence Satan exerts to blind the hearts of those upon whom conviction is about to fasten itself; they silenced their serious expressions by this hasty conclusion, that a person whose birth was so low, could not be the Messiah. Our Lord replied to them, that notwithstanding their supposed acquaintance with his origin, he came to them with an express commission from that God of whom they were perfectly ignorant. This reproof was more than they could bear; they were filled with rage, and were only prevented from acts of violence by some strong impression upon their minds which restrained their malice: for it was not possible that they should have power to destroy him till the purposes of heaven were fulfilled. Yet there were many of the lower order who seemed convinced

that he was the Christ, and they argued rightly that the promised deliverer could not do more miracles than Jesus had done.

These favourable dispositions in the people alarmed the members of the Jewish council which was then assembled, and officers were immediately sent to apprehend him. But their evil designs were overruled by the Saviour's firmness: he continued to preach even before the face of those who were charged with a commission to seize him. He warned them, that notwithstanding their opposition, he should proceed in his work a little longer; that in a short time he should return to the glory which he had left, and be removed beyond the reach of their violence, and that they should seek in vain, to be admitted into his presence. How solemn was this admonition! Alas! how few consider the time of their visitation! How few in our own day consider that Jesus who waits upon them in the ministry of his word, will soon withdraw himself—and that an eternal separation must take place between them and the Saviour, if they will not have him to reign over them in this life—"now is the accepted time—this is the day of salvation."

On the last day of the feast, when the assemblage of Jews was larger than usual, our Lord took occasion to proclaim aloud the rich mercy of the Gospel, inviting the application of all who were truly desirous of spiritual blessings. We are informed by historians, that on that day it was customary with the Jews to fetch water in a golden vessel from the fountain of Siloam, and having brought it into the temple with sound of trumpets, and other ceremonies, to pour it out before the Lord with all possible expressions of joy.* On this occasion, "Jesus stood and cried; saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." The erection of his body, and the elevation of his voice, were indications of the earnestness with which he delivered the offers of most plentiful supplies of grace to every thirsty soul. To those who believed, he promised that rivers of living water should flow from them; which means, that they themselves should not only be enriched with the abundant influences of the Holy Spirit, but that streams of blessing should issue from them, by which they should be the means of refreshing and comforting many others. To us the same blessing is offered—the same invitation is given. His ambassadors address us in these words, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." The

* See Isaiah xii.—the song supposed to be sung on that occasion.

Saviour's invitation is general—"If *any* man thirst," whoever he may be—rich or poor, old or young, "let him come to me and drink." Thirsty souls that come to Christ, shall be satisfied. He will be in them—"a well of water springing up into everlasting life:" a well of "living water," that is, ever-flowing, in opposition to stagnant water, which is called dead, because motionless. The fountain to which you are invited is inexhaustible—its waters convey the blessing of eternal life. Do you thirst for this living water? Have you gone to the fountain? Have you obtained the Holy Spirit?

These momentous declarations of Jesus excited various debates among the people. Some were disposed to honour him as a prophet—others to acknowledge him as the Christ; but as they imagined he was born in Galilee, it was argued that the prophecies were not fulfilled, and most of them being too careless, or too bigotted to enter into further inquiries, they concluded by rejecting him. The very men who were employed to apprehend him, listened to his words till they were so struck with admiration and reverence, that they were unable to execute their purpose, and returned without their prisoner, alleging in excuse for not fulfilling their commission, that "never man spake like this man." How easily can the Lord overawe and confound his enemies! "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."* Many persons have been thus obliged to relinquish their designs of violence, and even to plead the cause of those whom they had determined to oppose, without being able to account for it; and not a few have been brought to a sincere conviction under the preaching of those whom they only went to hear for the purpose of ridicule and profane jest. The members of the Jewish council were grieved that the officers had returned without Jesus, and inquired if they also were deceived, and whether any of the nobility had become his disciples. What fatal delusion blinded them! they would not believe till the rich and learned set them an example! Nicodemus was an honourable exception to the assertion just made—"He came to Jesus at the first by night," but now openly and boldly he confesses Christ—how delightful to observe such progress in God's children—to see earnest inquirers become bold confessors! May many in affluence and power, who, like him, have a seat in the nation's councils, be found to stand forward in defence of the Gospel of Christ.

* Psalm lxxvi. 10.

CHAP. VIII. 1—20.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY—THE PHARISEES' CRAFTY DESIGNS—HE CONVICTS THEM, AND FORGIVES HER—CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the moring he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not.* So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true. Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, *yet* my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.

How incessantly was Christ occupied for the good of man! His night was, at this time, spent in the Mount of Olives, and his day in the temple: his night in prayer—his day in preaching! How ill do they resemble him whose lives are spent in pleasure and self-gratification! Early in the morning he returned to the temple, and, not discouraged with the opposition he had met with, resumed his work of instructing the people. Crowds now attended him, but while some came from a good motive, others were actuated by an evil one: the Scribes and Pharisees came, having laid a snare in which they felt sure of

entrapping him. They brought with them a woman charged with the crime of adultery, in order that Jesus might pass judgment upon her. But why bring the woman alone, since the man's offence was equal, if not greater? Was it out of cunning, hoping that the merciful disposition of Jesus might incline him to excuse the crime of the weaker vessel? Or was it not rather out of partiality? perhaps it was the case then, as it is now, that public opinion condemned that crime in the woman, which it allowed to pass uncensured in the man. Why was not the adulterer brought up for judgment? The same law which consigned the adulteress to death, passed a like sentence on the accomplice in her guilt; * and if public opinion were now regulated by the law of God, as it ought to be, the man who is known to be guilty of adultery, should share the measure of public censure with the adulteress. But the law of public opinion is partial in its judgment. The weaker party generally suffers. How inconsistent to punish a servant for drunkenness by loss of his place, whilst the master indulges in the same or similar sins, and sometimes without much public censure. If public opinion held an even balance, the rich and poor who are alike guilty, would equally suffer: neither the one nor the other would be allowed to pass unpunished.

He who could read the hearts of these Pharisees tells us, "this they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him." They urged the command of Moses that this woman should be *stoned*, whereas the law had directed that in case of adultery, *both* parties should be put to death; their tradition specified that which the word of God did not. It was clear, however, that death was awarded to the crime of adultery; and it is no small stain upon a Christian land, that that crime is held in such little abhorrence, yea even passes unpunished, whilst Jews and Pagans considered it worthy of death. The Pharisees having stated what the law of the case was, begged our Lord's decision upon it: "Moses said thus—but what sayest thou." Here was their craftiness: they argued thus; either Christ will second Moses in sentencing this woman to death, or he will contradict Moses by pardoning her. If he commands her to be stoned, he will lose his character for clemency, and he will take upon him the office of judge, to which he is not entitled; if he pardons her, he will lose his character for justice, and contradict the command of God by Moses. In either case they felt sure of en-

* See Lev. xx. 10.

tangling him, and so of disproving his pretensions to being the Messiah. Oh! the folly of those mortals who, like the Jews before us, search the Scriptures in order to detect what they call contradictions! Though our weak powers cannot fathom all that God has revealed, yet Moses and Christ shall never be found to differ in a single point.

Jesus, at first, took no notice of their question, but with seeming indifference, stooped down, and wrote upon the ground.* They therefore pressed him for an answer, and, now, forced by their solicitation, he replied in a manner which they little expected, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Conscience, hitherto dormant, is now awakened, for our Lord showed his knowledge of sins which they thought had been long since buried in forgetfulness. What secret is there which Jesus seeth not? If we could retire into the centre of the earth, his eye would still follow us, and observe our doings. No bolt—no bar—no darkness can keep him out. No thief was ever so foolish as to steal in the presence of his judge; yet man sins, daringly, in the presence of that God, who sees his most secret actions.

No sooner did these hypocrites hear of their sins, than they went out, one by one: they should have stayed, and implored pardon from him, who could have pardoned their sin as well as convict them, but like many amongst ourselves, they turned their backs upon their own mercies. Jesus is now left with the woman. She might also have gone, for no person constrained her to stay, but it would seem as if, though guilty, she was neither hardened, nor impenitent; and her addressing Jesus by the name of "Lord," would lead us to hope that she owned his divinity, and looked to him for pardon. Two things were necessary for the execution of a criminal—evidence and sentence. Our Lord asked for both—"Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee—go, and sin no more." Let us not mistake our Lord's conduct here, as if he had set aside the law which required this woman's death. Had she been condemned *by the lawful authorities*, he would not have interfered to release her; but not being thus condemned, he would not assume the office of judge in her case,

* In allusion to Numb. v. 17. where the priest was to stoop down and take some of the dust from the floor of the tabernacle, and likewise to write the curses in a book, v. 23. All that were guilty must be excluded, and this was our Lord's first blow at these proud and ungodly accusers.

any more than he would before interfere for those brethren who were disputing about an inheritance.* Christ came not as a judge of civil or criminal causes—he came at his first advent as a Saviour. His office of judge belongs to his second coming. His language now is that of pardoning love. He says to every penitent soul, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," freely, fully, and everlastingly. But he adds this injunction, "Go, and sin no more:" pardon and holiness must be joined together. What can wean so much from sin as a view of Christ's marvellous love to sinners?

We are told that our Lord had gone into the temple, "early in the morning," (v. 2) and now, perhaps, with a view of the sun breaking forth, he borrowed from it a faint image of his divine influence, and spoke of himself as "the light of the world." As the festival had ended the evening before, we may suppose, that many of his hearers were preparing to return to distant parts of the country. The brightness of the day is the traveller's opportunity. To such, our Lord seems to have addressed the latter part of the verse, "he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." He exhorted them to remember that his stay amongst them was their opportunity, and that walking by his guidance, they should never be benighted. Jesus is now exalted, like the sun in the firmament, dispersing his heavenly rays of spiritual light and heat. Are our eyes turned to him? Are we walking through this wilderness by the aid of that light which he affords, or are we groping in the darkness of unconversion? The spirit of Christ alone can lead us to the land of blessedness. Oh! let us pray that Christ woud enlighten our darkness by the beams of his Holy Spirit.

CHAP. VIII. 21—37.

THE PENALTY OF UNBELIEF—THE LIBERTY OF THE GOSPEL—THE MISTAKES AND IGNORANCE OF THE JEWS.

Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even *the same* that I said unto you from the beginning. I have

* See Luke xii. 13, 14.

many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father, Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am *he*, and *that* I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone: for I do always those things that please him. As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: *but* the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

In this discourse, as in many others, Jesus united mercy and warning. He now dwells on the awful condition of those who heard him, and yet remained unbelieving, declaring in the most solemn manner, that they could not go to the abode of his glory, because "they should die in their sins;" which seems a prophecy of God's terrible judgment on many who rejected the plainest evidence for the truth of the Gospel. Oh! how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God! How dangerous to trifle with the message of the Gospel; for this sin, especially, men will be sorely punished in the day of wrath. None can go to Jesus and his glory, but those who now receive him as the true Messiah—the only Saviour of guilty man. They also enjoy a meetness for his kingdom, so that when called hence, their desires and taste are prepared for heavenly things. Is this your case, or are you still indisposed towards the service of Christ? If you now dislike the service of God, and the society of those who are God's devoted servants, it is impossible that you could like that place, which is the essence of holiness. Death will not change your taste or desires; they must be changed by God's grace before you die, or where Christ is, there you never *can* be.

After our Lord had more clearly expressed that he came from heaven, to do the will of his Father, "many believed on him;" and for the comfort of those who believed, he expounded the doctrine concerning the spiritual liberty of true christians. How graciously does the Lord Jesus look to those who tremble at his word, and are ready to receive it! How carefully does he cherish the beginnings of grace, and goes forth to meet those who

are on their way towards him! To these Jews he says:—"if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." This implies that there are some who are only christians in appearance; who seem to set out well in the heavenly race, but do not *continue* to the end. This is the difference between mere profession and real godliness—one is temporary, the other is permanent—one belongs only to the sunshine, the other endures the storm; hence continuance is the great test of reality in religion.*

The privileges of the believer are next stated—"they shall know the truth," experimentally, "and the truth shall make them free"—free from the power of sin—free from the bondage of the world's opinion—and free from future punishment. This doctrine of freedom could not be understood by the carnal Jews present, who immediately said, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." What a false assertion! Were they not in bondage to the Egyptians, and to the Babylonians, and were they not at that moment tributary to the Romans? But anything serves as an excuse for those who wish to get rid of the truth. Our Lord, without exposing their falsehood, explained that the bondage he meant was spiritual, and that as every one who obeys the commands of another, is servant to that person; so, they who do what Satan desires, are his servants, or slaves, and are therefore, in bondage to him: that their boast of being Abraham's children was vain, for though they thereby had a place in God's house, yet, being servants to Satan, they were, like servants, liable to be turned out of their situation; while he, among them, who was a true child of God, would, like a son in the family, be sure of a constant residence with his Father. Though he may sometimes offend and be corrected, yet he will not be turned out as servants are: the doors lie open to let him in, when, like the prodigal, he has run away; and when he has been bred in the church awhile (which is the lower room of the house) and has been fed upon the hope and first-fruits of his inheritance, he will be carried up to the upper-rooms of the church triumphant, there to get full possession, and to enjoy God and his immediate presence for ever.†

The Jews have for a long season been deprived of the privileges of the household of faith, and we have been taken into the outward church in their place. Are we then in heart the servants of Satan, or the sons of God? If we are living in the

* See Heb. iii. 14.

† Hutcheson on St. John, p. 164.

commission of known sin, we are the slaves of Satan, and shall assuredly be turned out also: but if we have received the spirit of adoption, by which we can call God our Father, we shall abide in his house for ever. "If the Son shall make you free, then ye shall be free indeed." The "Son" here refers to the "first-born" among many brethren—the Son of God, not by adoption, as the believer is, but by right of nature and existence—who has all gifts at his own disposal, and therefore has authority and power to make us free. He discharges prisoners by paying their debts, and by answering the demands of injured justice, on account of which they were arrested. He takes the bond and judgment into his own hands, and gives them up cancelled to all who by faith apply for this freedom. Being thus delivered from the deserved penalty of sin, the believer has also the spirit of liberty in God's service—he is free from Satan's bondage, and he delights in walking in God's ways.* This alone is liberty—every other kind is nominal or delusive. May we enjoy more of this blessedness, which is a prelude to the perfect service of heaven!

NOTE on v. 36.—"The freedom of my will itself, O Jesus, is the most servile thing in me, and the most enslaved, so long as it is not set at liberty by thee. The more thou leavest it to itself, the less will it be free."—Quesnel on the Gospels.

CHAP. VIII. 38—59.

SATAN, THE AUTHOR OF SIN—WHO ARE HIS CHILDREN—CHRIST THE SELF-EXISTENT GOD.

I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, *even* God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth,

* Rom. vi. 17, 18, 22.

why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Yet ye have not known him: but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it*, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

The difference between our Lord's views and those of the Jews is less surprising, when we discover the true source of both; he declares to them, therefore, "I speak that which I have seen with *my* Father, and ye do that which ye have seen with *your* father." Here are two fathers mentioned, according to the two families into which the sons of men are divided—God, and Satan. We have reason to rejoice that the Lord Jesus on this occasion, so clearly stated the character which marks the children of these two families, that we, by a careful comparison of ourselves with what he has declared, may be enabled to judge whether we are the children of God, or the children of Satan.

Observe now his answer to the Jews: they boasted, first, that Abraham was their father. This our Lord disproved, by showing that though they were his *literal* seed, they were not his *spiritual* children—for in respect to the features of true godliness, they did not resemble Abraham. Abraham believed in Christ—they did not: he was remarkable for humanity—they for inhumanity, in that they were seeking to kill him. They, amongst us, who would approve themselves the children of Abraham, must do the works of Abraham: at God's call they must follow him fully,*—they must resign their dearest comforts, and live as strangers and pilgrims in this world,†—and they must keep up the worship of God in their families; ‡ these were some of the works of Abraham. When our Lord thus referred to their origin, the Jews

* Gen. xii. 1—4. † Heb. xi. 9, 13. ‡ Gen. xviii. 19.

fancied that our Lord accused them of idolatry, which, in prophetic language, is called spiritual fornification.* At this they exclaimed, that so far from being idolaters, God was their Father. But to this fallacious plea, our Lord gave a full answer, and proved by two arguments, that they had no right to call God their Father; *first*, because they did not love Christ. "If," says he, God were your Father, ye would love me." All that have God for their Father, have a true love for Jesus Christ; not merely *saying* that they love him, but *acting* as if they loved him. Deeds, not words, form the test by which we shall be tried. *Secondly*, because they "did not understand his speech." Christ's speech was heavenly, and if they had understood the spiritual language of the prophets, they would have known Christ: † but such was their prejudice against him, that they could not be persuaded to give him a patient hearing on any occasion. His life was blameless; they could not convict him of any thing; and he therefore fairly asks, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" How much alike are the opposers of the Gospel in all ages of the world! Many there are, at present, who heartily dislike religious people, and brand them with scornful appellations: and why is this? The secret of this opposition is, that they cannot bear that holiness which stands in contrast to their sin and worldliness, and they would gladly avoid those, who tacitly rebuke them for their sins.

Our Lord having disproved their relation both to Abraham and to God, next, plainly told the Jews whose children they were; "Ye are of your father, the devil." This was manifest by two instances in which they resembled him—murder, and lying. What a description is this of the *origin* of sin, and its baneful effects in the world. Satan is the *murderer* of soul and body, and by him the world is filled with such error and delusion as poison the soul, and such unholy and unruly passions as destroy the body. And from whence does all falsehood and lying come? Is it not from this fallen angel? who, as our Lord says, "abode not in the truth," (intimating that he was once in it,) and who insinuated the same dreadful sin into man's nature. Ever since the fall, the world has been full of lying and falsehood—every false system of religion is a lie,‡—the heathen are sunk in it—the Jews too eagerly embraced error—and thousands, now called Christians, reject the truth and cleave to the

* See Jer. iii. 1. † See Chap. v. 45—47. ‡ See 2 Thess. ii. 11.

vain inventions of man. Or if we look for truth in the usual transactions of life, how may we conclude, that it has almost "perished from the earth." Satan has filled the world with a spirit of falsity—strict truth is a rare jewel, seldom sought after or prized, whereas lying lips prevail every where. Let us remember that God abominates all such, and that all who continue liars shall have their portion in the lake of fire.*

With this we may contrast the blessedness of believers: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death," which intimates at once the character and immortality of God's people—they are endued with a principle of holiness which death cannot destroy—they are not only to live for ever, but to be like God, and dwell with him in eternal blessedness. Death, therefore, has no real victory over them—it is a conquered enemy, and they who know Christ shall never *see* its bitterness, as the wicked do. The Jews immediately cavilled at this saying; in their ignorance they imagined that Christ meant that his followers should live for ever in this world, and never die. They, therefore, adduced the example of Abraham and the prophets as having long ago ceased to live, and then asked our Lord if he intended to make himself greater than Abraham. His reply was decisive, and his proof most conclusive. Abraham rejoiced in seeing Christ's day, and therefore Christ was before Abraham. That patriarch had received the special promises of the Messiah, and by faith's vision he looked forward to their accomplishment.† To him also, as to others, Christ appeared in human form, before his actual incarnation, as when he spoke to him on the plains of Mamre, before the destruction of Sodom.‡ Here again the Jews cavilled, and asked how it was possible for him who was not fifty years old to have seen Abraham. Our Lord was not at this time more than thirty-three years old, yet was his countenance so worn with grief and sorrow, that the Jews, judging by appearance, might well mistake his age. But our Lord hesitated not to declare that he was greater than Abraham, for he said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." Here he takes to himself the incommunicable name of JEHOVAH.§ The mode of speaking which our Lord adopts is peculiar to the God-head; and unless we charge him with blasphemy, as the Jews did, it amounts to a full proof that he is the unchangeable Jehovah, the same from everlasting to everlasting, who had revealed himself to Moses by that adorable name, "I AM," which implies his

* Rev. xxi. 8.
† See Gen. xii. 3.
‡ Gen. xviii. 1, 20, 22.
§ See Exod. iii. 14.

self-existence. Here the Jews were enraged, beyond bearing, and would have stoned him, had he not timely separated himself from them. How do we receive his words? Do we believe in Jesus as he is here exhibited to us? Do we triumph in that Saviour whom Abraham beheld with joy? Are we drawing out of that fulness of his grace which is laid up in him?

CHAP. IX. 1—17.

THE MAN THAT WAS BORN BLIND RESTORED TO SIGHT—ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others *said*, He is like him: *but* he said, I am *he*. Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not. They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath-day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath-day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

THE actions of our blessed Lord, no less than his words, are instructive. In the last chapter we heard him speak at considerable length to the Jews, in the temple, on those momentous truths which concern us, as well as them: here he speaks to us in the expressive language of a miracle, which, if properly improved, may yield us a store of instruction. The object of his compassion was a poor beggar who was blind—not by accident or disease, but was so from his birth; he was born blind. His

case, therefore, required not the art of an oculist to remove some temporary affection, but the power of Omnipotence to create what he never possessed. That power was at hand, though he knew it not; or if he did know by report that Jesus passed by, he did not, like another blind man whom we read of,* cry out for assistance; but Jesus, unsolicited, healed him, of his own free love and pity. When the disciples saw that his case attracted the Saviour's notice, they begged to know whether his own sin, or that of his parents, had been the cause of his blindness.† Though it frequently happens that man's suffering is caused by his sin, and often, too, that the diseases of children are entailed upon them by the sins of their parents, yet this was not a case in point, as our Lord informed the disciples, for that blindness was given to this man that the glory of God might be advanced by his cure. Our Lord, too, gives a reason for his forwardness in these works of mercy, because his time on earth was limited, and that as he was the great source of life and light to the world, he should dispense his radiant beams as widely as possible before the sun should set. Oh! what reason have we to improve the present time (the only time of which we can be certain) while Jesus shines forth in the invitations of his Gospel. It is not sufficient that he shine *upon* us outwardly by the gift of revelation—he must shine also into our hearts by the power of his blessed Spirit. "The night cometh when no man can work." We cannot compute how near our sun is to its setting, nor can we promise ourselves a twilight between the day of life, and the night of death. If our day closes before our peace is made with God, a night of endless woe shall inevitably be ours.

After this instructive preface, our Lord proceeded to the miracle. At times he cured the diseased by word of mouth; at others, he employed some means, but always so simple as to prove that the virtue was derived alone from him who used them. Here he used clay, which we might suppose was more likely to stop the eyes of the seeing, than to give sight to the blind: he made mortar of clay and spittle, and anointed the eyes of the man. The faith of this man must, however be tried: Jesus therefore would have him go with his eyes thus daubed, to the pool of Siloam. The meaning of this word "Siloam" is expressly said

* See Mark x. 46.

† This proves that the Jews held the doctrine of transmigration of souls, and that the soul which had sinned in one body, was often punished in the body into which it next passed. The disciples being Jews, had not got rid of their error. See the Apocryphal book—the Wisdom of Solomon, chap. viii. 20.

to signify "sent," in order to show that the healing virtue was no more in its water, than it was in the clay, but in HIM who was the Messiah—the "Sent" of God. The man being led to the pool, washed, and returned seeing! We can more easily conceive, than describe, the feelings of one who after having lived thirty years, perhaps, without sight, should be suddenly blessed with the organs of vision. How must this poor man have been astonished! what a new world was presented to him! How must he have wondered at the faces and shapes of all the people around him—the great variety of colours—the cheerfulness of the light—the lively beams of the sun—the stately palaces of Jerusalem—and the magnificent structure of the temple. These he might have been acquainted with by the hearing of his ear, but now his eye *saw* them. Endeavour to apply these things to the condition of your soul. Turn your thoughts within—try if you can discover whether any similar change has been wrought upon the organs of your spiritual sight. When Adam fell, man lost his power of spiritual discernment, and you, and all of us, are not only tainted with the same disease, but were actually *born blind*—so blind as to be unable to walk through this world without a guide—so blind that we cannot see through the baits and cheats which Satan holds out for us in the shape of sensual gratifications—so blind that though we have eyes to read the print in God's Book, we cannot discern its spiritual meaning. Ask yourself the important question, Has this spiritual blindness been removed? Has Jesus given you sight? If you are "renewed in the spirit of your mind," what a change has taken place! A new world has opened upon you—you see with new eyes—you are made acquainted with joys and pleasures which you never felt before—you see new beauties in the word of God—and your sight grows brighter every day. Well may the Scripture say, "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*, old things are passed away, behold *all things* are become new."*

This man, whose trade was beggary, must have been well-known in Jerusalem. By as much, then, as he was known, by so much is the fame of this miracle spread. Some, however, doubted of his identity: and if the neighbours who were used to see him led by a guide, or guided by a staff, now saw him walking by the light of his own eyes—no wonder if they doubtingly, or cautiously said, "he is like him," without being sure whether he was the same person or not. The restoration to sight from

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

that spiritual blindness of which we have just spoken, works so sensible an alteration in the man who experiences it, that those who knew him in his unregenerate character, may well say, as they often do, "He is so completely altered, that I should scarcely know him to be the same person." Has your conversation, once frivolous, now become edifying and instructive? Is the time which you once mispent, now devoted to the service of the Lord? These are tokens whereby we can distinguish those, whose hearts have been changed by the Spirit of God. Apply to yourselves, individually, what you have heard, and if you are sensible that you are not yet blessed with spiritual sight, pray to the Lord Jesus to enlighten your darkness by the illuminating beams of his Holy Spirit. Go, wash in the fountain of Siloam, and you shall return seeing.

NOTE on v. 7.—Moreover Christ wished to shew that he was not contrary to the Old Law by thus sending the blind man to the pool of Siloam, since there was no fear of Siloam having the glory, many having washed their eyes there, but received no benefit.—Chrysostom, Hom. lv. 1.

CHAP. IX. 18—41.

THE BLIND MAN HEALED CONFESSETH CHRIST—HE IS EXCOMMUNICATED—JESUS INSTRUCTS HIM MORE FULLY.

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These *words* spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner *or no*, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear *it* again? will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: *as for* this *fellow*, we know not from whence he is. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and *yet* he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world

began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe, And he worshipped him. And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

No truths have received such full proof, as those that have been most questioned. Great pains were taken by the Pharisees to disprove the miracle which our Lord had wrought upon the man that was born blind, but their malignant opposition only tended to confirm the evidence, and to publish it more widely. In our last lecture, we left the poor man standing before the Pharisees, undergoing an examination concerning the manner in which his sight had been received. The simple account which he gave of it, caused a division among his judges; some, with feigned sanctity, argued that Christ could not be the Messiah, because he had done this work on the Sabbath-day: others, whose consciences were more tender, could not agree in this position, and justly doubted whether a deceiver could do such a miracle. However, in order to discover the imposture, if any such existed, they agreed to send for the parents of the man; but upon examining them, their perplexity was increased, for the parents gave evidence that the man *was* their son, and that to their knowledge, he had been born blind: this is quite sufficient evidence for us; and the Pharisees had too much proof to please them, that the man had been perfectly cured; but on the subject of Christ's miracle, the parents refused to answer, through fear of excommunication, which all were threatened with who acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah. The man was, therefore, again questioned by the rulers; and while they, with vehemence and bitterness, reviled Jesus as a worthless impostor, the poor beggar ventured to plead his cause with confidence. He maintained before them all, that the miracle was undeniable, and the conclusion from it reasonable, that Jesus must have received his commission from heaven. This provoked them the more, and without any other charge of guilt, they immediately passed sentence of excommunication upon him. Had not these Jewish

rulers been more blind than the man was before he was cured, they would, in this one work, have both seen and acknowledged the Deity of Jesus. But how miserable was their case, when, with such evidence before them, they still hardened their hearts, and determined not to be convinced. They are much more to be pitied than the poor man whom they banished from their communion. Every true church should excommunicate its rebellious members. And if we be cast out of a church where Christ reigneth, we should consider it a horrible sentence, because we are banished from the kingdom of the Son of God; and if we repent not, and seek admission again, we shall perish in our sins; but in two cases, excommunication has no weight, either when it is uttered on mistaken grounds, or by a false, heretical church. Christ will not sanction any thing but a just sentence passed by a true church.* This man, though uneducated, and in a great measure ignorant of the real character of Christ, dared to act agreeably to his conscience, and refused to depart from his testimony whatever he might suffer.

An important question here arises, which you will do well to put to your own hearts. Do you, like this poor beggar, vindicate the character of Jesus, in the face of those who oppose you for believing in him? Can you speak of any benefit which you have received from him? Can you declare that Jesus has communicated light to your mind, and say, as the beggar did, if you can say no more, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." By such a simple testimony as this, many an unlettered peasant has pleaded the cause of Christ with great success, and sometimes to the confusion of the most learned adversaries. But are you sure, that this change *has* taken place in your heart. Are you sure that your natural blindness has been removed by the Sprit of God, and that you now see? Do not flatter yourself in a false security; you may pass for a moral character amongst men, but that will not satisfy the Lord who knows your heart, and who has declared that "except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." If you are a Christian, you will be ready to ascribe the happy change to the free love and favour of Jesus, and to avow your attachment to him. This, you may say, will expose you to reproach and bitter persecution. Be it so. What have you to fear, while you stand up for the honour of your Saviour? It is a service of which you need not be ashamed, and in which you need not dread consequences: they have most to fear who shrink from it.

* See Marlorate on St. John, p. 354.

The poor outcast, it appears, understood but little of Jesus; yet being faithful to his convictions, he obtained further information. The Saviour sought after him, that he might reveal himself to him. Upon being asked, therefore, "dost thou believe on the Son of God?" he confessed his ignorance, but, at the same time, showed that he was a serious inquirer after truth, and eagerly desirous of instruction. Accordingly, no sooner had Jesus declared himself to be that exalted character, than he cried out with holy rapture, "Lord, I believe;" and then paid him divine honour, by worshipping him. Thus he received a double cure, and exhibited, by the change wrought, both in his body and on his heart, unquestionable proofs of the power and grace of the Redeemer. How seasonable was this comfort to the excommunicated man, while he was suffering under a severe and unjust sentence! He had now cause to rejoice in having borne testimony to the truth. The Lord will always give strength and consolation to those who seek him in sincerity, and who are not ashamed to confess him before men. Fear not, therefore, you who are faithfully devoted to him, whatever may come upon you in his service. Should even your dearest friends cast you off for the truth's sake, he will prevent you from sinking under the trial, and will afford you strength and comfort suited to your need.

Our Lord, in addressing the man to whom he had given sight, conveyed both information and encouragement, while he observed that one grand design of his appearance, was to communicate the light of spiritual life to all who feel that they are destitute of it. But he added, that he came also for *judgment* as well as mercy—to expose their folly who boasted of their own understanding, and to seal them up in ignorance, who were too wise to be taught. Some of the Pharisees were present at the latter part of this declaration, and considering that they, by insinuation, were charged with spiritual blindness, they were offended. It surely is offensive to the pride of those who have acquired a reputation for learning and research, to be treated as spiritually dark, and as having the same need of that change of heart, as the most illiterate. Jesus therefore warned them that they could not plead want of information in excuse for their unbelief, for they had heard the truth from him; but that it was their pride of knowledge which kept them in ignorance, and would greatly aggravate their guilt and condemnation. Those only that are convinced of their disease, are in a fair way of recovery, for they will seek, and apply, the remedy; but *their*

sin shall remain, who, self-confident, boast of sight, while they walk in darkness.

CHAP. X. 1—18.

CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD—DISTINGUISHED FROM THE THIEF, THE STRANGER, AND THE HIRELING.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

To understand this important chapter aright, we must bear in mind the great design of our Lord's discourse with the Scribes and Pharisees. In the former chapter we find them questioning his miracles and gainsaying his authority; Christ therefore showed that the real cause of their objections was their spiritual blindness; and he now shows them that he is the only source of authority in his Church. He declares himself to be the true Messiah, of whom the prophets spoke, and that all teachers who did not receive him and set him forth, were unworthy of their office, and destitute of the marks of faithful pastors. To explain better the nature of his Church, he compares it to a *fold*,—him-

self to the *Great Shepherd* of it, and his people to the sheep of the same; to this figurative language the Jews were accustomed,—the prophets having described the Church by the very same comparison, and prophesied of the glorious Messiah by the name of the shepherd.* In the exposition of this part of the chapter, we shall chiefly dwell on the office and character of the good shepherd, and in the next lecture refer to the features and marks of Christ's sheep.

Our Lord first compares the good shepherd with "the thief and the robber;" the design of the latter is always to plunder and destroy, and therefore they come not through the door, but climb up some other way. This our Lord applies to "all who came before him" (v. 8.) with the name and pretext of teachers sent from God, but in reality they were false Christs and false prophets. He did not refer to the inspired servants of God, who prophesied before his time, for they came through the door; but to all systems of religion that sprung from man; whether as corruptions of the truth, or directly opposed to it. All such teachers would poison the sheep by their bad pastures, if the Lord did not preserve them. But as then, so now, the sheep did not hear them. In all ages God keeps his people from destructive heresies, to which others give heed.† The Lord Jesus comes through the door, in the way marked out by the will of the Father, and set forth in the words of the prophets—hence the Father acts as porter, and at once acknowledges the Son—opens the door, and commits to him the whole care of the sheep-fold. His mission is indeed divine—his office fraught with blessings to sinners—he comes to give life to his sheep, and now they have a more abundant enjoyment of it, than those who lived before his coming.

The good shepherd also differs from the *stranger*, because the sheep will follow the one and not the other. By this name *unauthorized* teachers seemed to be intended—they are not so destructive in their intention as the thief—but they would lead the sheep from the unity of the fold into many other inclosures. Even in the early Church there were divisions and contentions‡—teachers assuming to be heads of different parties, and many inclined to rank themselves under them; and therefore were the apostles obliged to rebuke these evils, and to exhort believers to cherish the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Those who love Christ will regard him as the centre of union, and should

* See Ezek. xxxiv. 12, 14, 23, 24.
† See 2 Tim. ii. 18, 19. ‡ See 1 Cor. i. 11, 12, 13.

avoid all teachers who separate from the apostolic fold of Christ's Church.

The *hireling* is also far inferior to the good Shepherd: a hireling is one employed by another in an appointed work, and for allotted wages.* The ministers of Christ are thus appointed to watch over and feed the flock of God. Some indeed are mere *hirelings* in feeling, and care not for the Master's work, but their own wages,—and yet they are to be heard; for as Christ would have the Scribes and Pharisees to be heard, because they sat in Moses' seat, so we must honour the Gospel in such wise, that we do not disdain the ministers thereof, though they be not so good as they ought to be.† We should pray for enlightening grace to be given to them, but we must not desert the fold, because we have not just the shepherd we should wish. Again, others are not only employed by the Lord, but are faithful and devoted ministers—yet they are weak and faint-hearted, when compared with the Good Shepherd—they have not the same love or care for the sheep as he has—nor the same willingness or power to meet the hour of danger—they often flee when the *wolf* cometh, not having power to resist Satan; and if the safety of the sheep depended on them, the whole flock must be a prey to the destroyer. Christ, however, had such intense love for the sheep, that he was ready to lay down his life for them, and his suffering and dying for them were so efficacious, that Satan was despoiled of his prey in the very way that he hoped to succeed. Jesus "gave his life a ransom for many," and now the enemy cannot destroy, though he may attack and distress the fold. Blessed be God for the riches of redeeming love, and blessed be his name for this perfect and glorious salvation.

What an instructive lesson does this chapter afford to the ministers of the Gospel. The character given of the good Shepherd ought to be continually before their eyes, for their constant imitation—Jesus ought to be their great example—like him they should seek the direction of God's providence and Spirit, as the proper call to the ministry; and having once entered by the door of authority, they should pray to divide the word rightly, and dispense truth without the admixture of human systems. Like him also they should pray for an intense love for souls, such as may lead them to spend and be spent in such a noble service. And let us all remember, that Christ is

* Job xiv. 6. † Marlorate, p. 369.

not only the true Shepherd, but the only *door* for the sheep. Through him we must come to the Father, and be admitted into all the fellowship of his Church—so shall we find pasture for our own souls, and be fitted for *going out* in all the activity of Christian usefulness and benevolence.

CHAP. X. 19—42.

THE FEAST OF THE DEDICATION—UNBELIEF OF THE JEWS—WHO ARE CHRIST'S SHEEP—THEIR SAFETY.

There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. I and *my* Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, —and the scripture cannot be broken,—Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.

Our Lord's declarations, related in the former part of this chapter, produced different sentiments in his hearers. Some turned away from him in disgust, and derided him as a madman, and unworthy of any serious attention. But there were others who judged more favourably of him, both from the doctrines he advanced, and the miracles he wrought. Jesus, how-

ever, still kept within public view, that all who pleased might enjoy the privilege of his conversation and advice. He was now in Jerusalem, at "the feast of the dedication." This feast was not one of those which God had directed the Jews to observe, but it was established by their own consent, to celebrate the dedication of a new altar, and the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabæus, after the temple had been profaned, and the altar defiled by Antiochus. It was also called the "feast of lights," because the Jews illuminated their houses in token of their joy at the restoration of the temple-service, after three years' interruption.* Our Lord's attendance on this occasion shows, that religious institutions, though not of divine establishment, may be observed, if not contradictory to the word of God.

As Jesus walked in the portico which surrounded the temple, many of the Jews came to him, but with no friendly disposition. They desired a still plainer declaration, whether he were the Messiah or not; and it is likely that they wished for it as a ground of accusation against him. Jesus, however, reproved them for their unbelief, in withholding credit to his claims after so many displays of miraculous power; and then plainly told them, that the reason of their unbelief, was because they were not his sheep. He then took occasion to describe both the gracious dispositions and happy state of those that are his sheep; and here let us carefully attend to the words of our Lord; because from the character which he gives of his true followers, we may be enabled, by comparing ourselves therewith, to ascertain whether we are the sheep of Christ or not.

Christ says that his sheep *hear his voice.* They distinguish it as the voice of their beloved. It is contained indeed in his inspired word, but made known to them by the inward teaching of the Spirit. He gives the sinner, before dead and careless, ears to hear the voice of the good Shepherd,—in this way he calleth his own sheep by name—not merely in the outward *call* of the preaching of the Gospel, but by the application of it to the heart; and this voice is ever after the voice of *comfort* and *direction* to the sheep—directing them to walk in the right way, and comforting them in the difficulties of it. They not only *hear*, but *follow* him too: as the sheep in eastern countries followed the voice of him whom they knew to be their shepherd, so the believing people of Christ willingly follow the

* See Josephus—Antiq. lib. xii. cap. vii. sect. 6, and 7.

Saviour, according to the commands of his word—the intimations of his providence—and the directions of his Spirit. Judging yourself by this character, are you one of Christ's sheep? Do you hear his voice? Do you follow him? If not, and supposing you continue so, the happy, glorious privileges that belong to his people, and which are next described, shall never be yours.

The Lord Jesus *knows* his sheep—in one sense, Jesus knows all persons, and all things. But he has a peculiar knowledge of his own people—a knowledge which never allows him to see them in want without relieving them. He knows their desires—their trials—their afflictions, with a deep interest in all, and a gracious attention to them all.* In other cases he is acquainted with their state, by his divine prescience; but in the case of his sheep, it is the knowledge of love, which delights in sympathy and relief. All this comfort you lose, if you are not one of Christ's sheep. But you will lose far more if you continue as you are. Christ has provided happiness for his sheep. He says, "I give unto them eternal life." The estate which he has settled upon them is valuable; it is life—eternal life. They have an immortal soul, therefore the happiness provided is "eternal life," equal to its duration. Life eternal is the only thing that can satisfy a soul immortal. This blessing is *given* to the Lord's people: it is not purchased—it is not merited—it is freely bestowed: "I *give* unto them eternal life." Nor is it a future gift only; he says not, "I *will* give," but "I give," or "do give." He now gives that spiritual life, which is eternal life begun—the earnest—the first fruits—the foretaste of it. Nor is this all. Jesus has undertaken not only that this happiness shall be preserved for his people, but that they shall be preserved for it: He says, "my sheep shall never perish," or, as the words also signify, "they shall not perish for ever." As there is an eternal life, so there is an eternal destruction: the soul not annihilated, but ruined; its existence continued, but its happiness irrevocably lost. All Christ's people are saved from this: whatever cross they meet with here, they shall not come into condemnation. Shepherds that have large flocks, often lose some of them, and suffer them to perish through neglect; but Christ has engaged that not one of his sheep shall perish. He pledges his power in their defence, saying, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." A mighty contest is here

* Psalm lvi. 8.

supposed about these sheep. The shepherd is so careful of their welfare, that he has them not only within his fold, and under his eye, but in his hand. What a blessing that their safety does not depend upon themselves, else would they wander again! Jesus does not only place his people in the right way, but keeps them therein: so that the praise of their salvation, from first to last, is all due to Christ.*

But that nothing might be wanting for the comfort of his people, Christ brings in his Father's power as a further security. "My Father," says he, "which gave them me, is greater than all." God is greater than all the enemies which his people have to encounter, and His power is engaged to preserve them. He gave them to his Son to be redeemed by him, and his honour is concerned to uphold his gift. They were given to the Son as a trust to be managed by him, and therefore God will still look after them. The safety of the saints is therefore inferred, because "no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand," and then further security may be calculated on, from the union of the two undertakers—"I and my Father are one;" and they have jointly and severally undertaken to preserve, and finally to save, the little flock. It is impossible to imagine any security to be greater than theirs, for whose preservation, divine love, power, and faithfulness, are all pledged.† Surely these blessings and privileges are to be desired above the perishing toys of this world! Nothing so excellent as Christ's love to his people, and nothing so stable and certain. Let us therefore keep close to the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls—and let us expect the blessed result of all—the appearing of the chief Shepherd, and the gift of that crown which fadeth not away.

NOTE on v. 35—Christ evidently referred to Ps. lxxxii. 1—6, where judges are called gods, as acting for God on the seat of justice; how much more might the Son be called God, who was one in nature with the Father? this is a certain proof of our Lord's divinity.

* Rom. viii. 37—39. † Heb. vi. 17, 18.

CHAP. XI. 1—17.

MARY'S MESSAGE ABOUT LAZARUS—CHRIST DELAYS—HIS LOVE FOR LAZARUS—HE RETURNS INTO JUDEA.

Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith he to *his* disciples, Let us go into Judea again. *His* disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead: And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already.

As a stream runs still stronger and wider, the nearer it comes to the ocean from whence it was derived, so did the Saviour display more astonishing tokens of his Godhead, the nearer he approached to his glory. Many mighty works had he done before, which were sufficient to convince the most incredulous; but who shall refuse to "honour him, even as they honour the Father," when they hear that in the presence of his enemies, who could have published the deception, were it such, he raised to life a man who had lain for four days in the grave? The subject of this miracle was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. They formed that happy family with whom the Saviour used to lodge: but this was no security against trial. The Lord's most favoured servants are often the most tried; let none of them, therefore, count affliction as an omen of ill, since they see this pious family visited with the messenger of death. Mary sends a message to Jesus, saying, "He whom thou lovest is sick." Not "he that lovest thee is sick," though that were

in itself true, but nothing to be compared with the love which the Saviour had for him. She pleads not the affection of Lazarus for Christ, but the mercy and love of Christ to him. The love of the christian is, at best, but the offspring of Christ's love: "we love him, *because* he *first* loved us."* Jesus receives the message, yet allows Lazarus to sicken, and languish, and die: nay—so little does he *seem* to care for the distress of this family, that "he abode still two days in the same place where he was."† The world would say that this was small proof of love and favour, but here is the patience of the saints, to trust the Saviour where they cannot trace him, and to feel sure that

> "Behind a frowning providence,
> He hides a smiling face."

This was the fact in the present instance, for with all this seeming neglect, his love towards the sorrowing sisters of Lazarus, was as warm as ever. The longer they were separated from their brother, the greater must have been their joy when re-united to him: and the longer Jesus delayed, the more astonishing was the miracle. Had he gone before Lazarus died, his recovery might have been attributed to the strength of his constitution, or to the skill of his physician, and thus Jesus would have lost the glory of the miracle. These, we may suppose, were the Saviour's motives for delay, and they should lead us, in future, to trust the Saviour, even when he seems most regardless of our state. When the time which *he* judged most proper had arrived, he then proposed to his disciples to return to Judea. The Jews had lately driven him from thence, but now his love for Lazarus, and his care for his own glory, drew him back again. We must be wise as serpents for our preservation; but we must not be terrified by danger when positive duty demands it. The disciples were, at first, afraid to return to Judea; but our Lord tells them, that he who follows where duty calls, has no more reason to apprehend danger, than a man need be afraid of falling, who walks by the light of the noon-day sun.

The journey to Judea is, therefore, decided on; but as our Lord had before told his disciples that Lazarus' sickness was not unto death—that is, unto *final* death, he would not now

* 1 John iv. 19.

† This we learn from chap. x. 40. was in Bethabara in the country of Peræa, which was some distance from Bethany. The distance and the delay in returning to Judea were all arranged that the miracle might be more conspicuous.

grieve them by telling them too suddenly (what his own omniscience alone had informed him of) that Lazarus was dead. He, therefore, strips the tidings of their terrifying character, and uses these gentle words, "our friend Lazarus sleepeth." What a sweet title is here given both to death and to Lazarus: death is *a sleep*—Lazarus is *our* friend. He says not, "my friend," nor "your friend," but *our* "friend;" thereby drawing them into a gracious familiarity with himself. Oh! the meekness and condescension of the Saviour, who "though he thought it not robbery to be equal with God," yet stoops to acknowledge his believing people as friends! * There may be love between persons of unequal rank, but friendship implies an intimacy. "Such honour have all his saints"—they are the friends of Christ. Can you say of Christ, "he is my friend?" Do you hold familiar intercourse with him in prayer? Do you go to him, as to a friend, in every hour of trial? If so, you need not be afraid of death, for the friends of Christ never die, in the sense of destruction—their souls are separated from the body, and rest with Jesus, and their bodies lie slumbering in the grave until the morning of the resurrection. Jesus watches over the sleeping dust, and will raise it up as a glorious body like his own †—hence the believer, whose sins are pardoned, need no more fear to die, than he fears to lay his weary head upon his pillow, after the toils of the day; for he knows that he shall rise refreshed, on the morning of the resurrection. Not so, the unconverted, worldly person: he, too, shall lie down, and shall also rise again, but with all the dread forebodings of spending an endless day in unutterable anguish. And why? because he would not make friends with Jesus. He now invites you: if you refuse, you may never be invited again.

Our Lord having explained to his disciples that Lazarus was dead, then spoke of going to Judea, and Thomas proposed to his fellow-disciples that they should accompany him, though he felt that they were going to certain danger. Christian love is not broken by death—it has an eternal existence; but *our* offices of friendship have a limit—we may follow the lifeless body and consign it to the tomb, but we can do no more. Not so with Jesus. He is a friend after death—after burial—after corruption. The grave-stone—the earth—the coffin, are no boundaries of his love, for he will yet collect the scattered ashes of his friends. Having been buried in corruption, they shall be raised incorruptible, and reign with him in glory.

* Heb. ii. 11. † Phil. iii. 20, 21.

CHAP. XI. 18—46.

MARTHA'S DECLARATION TO CHRIST—MARY MEETS AND WORSHIPS HIM—LAZARUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother, Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat *still* in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give *it* thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly, and came unto him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore, again groaning in himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.

JESUS was now on his way to Bethany, and the news of his approach travelled before him. Martha was always the most

active: she who before was so busy about her household affairs, in order to entertain Jesus, is now the first to go forth and meet him, but not as formerly, with joy and gladness; her sighs and tears are tokens of a disconsolate mourner. Great was the opinion which both she and her sister had of the power of Christ. Yet there was a mixture of faith and unbelief in their expressions: they acknowledged the power in Christ to have prevented their brother's death: but they considered his presence necessary, to raise him to life. They each say—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Martha, though now rather faithless when Jesus spoke of raising her brother, yet gave evident proof that she had not been an unprofitable attendant upon his instruction. Her first acknowledgment was that there would be a resurrection at the last day, and to this time she referred the words of the Lord, when he said that her brother should rise again. She afterwards declared her belief that he was "the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." This confession was drawn forth by our Lord's appeal to her, whether she believed the gracious declaration which he had just uttered—"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." These are precious promises, and were intended to be the comfort of mourning sinners to the end of time. Do you know, by experience, the value of these promises? When sin entered into the world, a three-fold curse of death fell upon man: the spiritual death of his soul—the temporal death of his body—and the eternal death of both body and soul hereafter: the two last are the consequence of the first. But Jesus came to redeem man by removing the curse; and they who believe in him, are now restored to spiritual life by the Spirit of God quickening the dead soul—in which sense believers are now risen with Christ *—and at his second coming, their bodies shall be raised in incorruption. Death shall be then swallowed up in victory, and the whole Church shall be glorified in body and soul in the blessed kingdom.

After this conference with our Lord, Martha hastens back to the village to call her sister. This she does privately—mindful perhaps, of the danger to which her Lord would be exposed, if it were known that he were so near Jerusalem. Mary immediately hastens to him, and the Jews who came to comfort her,

* Col. iii. 1.

quickly follow, thinking that she was gone to the grave to weep. But not so: she came to Jesus, and though all who acknowledged him to be the Christ were threatened with excommunication, yet, in the presence of many Jews, who might inform the rulers of her act, she fell at the Saviour's feet, and by her gesture, said as much as her sister before had spoken—"thou art the Christ, the Son of God." They who are ashamed to confess Christ before men, need not hope to be acknowledged by him hereafter. Our Lord now inquires where the body of Lazarus lay; and they, urged by the hope which this question inspired, quickly answered, saying, "Lord, come and see." Seldom were our Lord's human feelings so moved as on this occasion. He now weeps tears of sympathy at the tomb of Lazarus. These tears were tokens of his real humanity, though shed at the moment when he gave the strongest proofs of his divinity. Never did any thing but love draw tears from the Saviour. Weak faith is still apt to lay difficulties in the Saviour's way. Martha says to Jesus, that the body of her brother must now be putrid, having lain four days in the grave; but he answers, "*Said I not* unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." For all our trials, there is a suitable promise in Scripture, and what Jesus once has said, may serve as an anchor for our souls in the most stormy day.

The stone being removed, our Lord proceeds to perform the miracle, and having first lifted up his eyes and heart in prayer, he then said in a commanding voice—"Lazarus, come forth!" and he that had been dead, came forth, clad in the robes of the grave, and shackled with his linen fetters. O! what a power accompanied the Saviour's voice, when it reached the ears of a corpse already turned to corruption! * Yet this was but the voice of Jesus in his state of humilation. What shall it be when he speaks in all the majesty of an approaching king! How shall the shrill flourish of the judge's trumpet penetrate the inmost soul of the guilty prisoner who is to stand at his bar! How shall unconverted sinners mourn when the last trump proclaims the coming Messiah! Where shall *you* be in that day? Shall you rise to reign with him, or shall you rise to condemnation? † Speak, sinner, speak! are your sins pardoned? Have you now

* These two sentences, "Jesus wept," and "Lazarus! come forth!" furnish us with the distinctive characteristics of the Son of Man and the Son of God. Christ's humanity appears in his tenderness and compassion. His divinity, in the voice of authority with which he bade the dead arise and come forth from the tomb.—*Gilly.*

† See Rev. xx. 5.

been raised to spiritual life? Is Jesus your friend? Are you amongst his friends? If so—well. Death will be but sleep to you. But the blackness of darkness shall be the everlasting portion of those who die without seeking and obtaining that change of heart, which is the accompanying token of pardon through Jesus.

CHAP. XI. 47—57.

THE JEWISH RULERS CONSULT TOGETHER—CAIAPHAS PROPHESIETH.

Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all *men* will believe on him; and the Romans shall come, and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, *named* Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all. Nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but, being high priest that year, he prophesied, That Jesus should die for that nation: And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews: but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should shew *it*, that they might take him.

THE astonishing miracle of Lazarus' resurrection, produced different effects upon those Jews who witnessed it: to some it was "the savour of life unto life:" to others, "the savour of death unto death."* Many, we are told, believed that Jesus was the Messiah in consequence of it; but others were so far from being convinced, that they carried information of it to the Pharisees—his avowed enemies—with the evil intention, as appears, of exciting opposition against him. At their report the grand council of the Jews was assembled, to consult upon the steps necessary to be taken to check his growing popularity. They said, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles." They own the truth of Christ's miracles, and

* 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

that he had wrought *many* of them; they are therefore witnesses against themselves, for they acknowledged his credentials, yet denied his commission. They apprehended two unhappy consequences if he were allowed to go on, unmolested; first—that "all men would believe on him." These Pharisees, when it suited their purpose, were inclined to despise Jesus as an insignificant person, not worthy their notice: * but now it was their interest to magnify his deeds, that they might represent him as aspiring to the kingly office, and therefore a person of such dangerous importance, as to justify them in putting him to death. How inconsistent are the opposers of the truth at all times! Those ministers who preach the Gospel, and those, too, who love their preaching, are often reviled as holding doctrines which loose the ties of moral obligation, and allow men to live as they please; and yet, withal, these same persons are censured for being righteous overmuch! The second cause of their fear was, lest if Jesus were proclaimed king by the people, the Romans would come and take vengeance on Cæsar's rival, and thus destroy their place and nation. But of this there could be no danger; for Christ had preached, that tribute should be paid to Cæsar; and the whole was a cowardly pretence of those, who by their sin, had lost the favour of their God, and therefore lost his protection,

It is a remarkable circumstance, that the same act by which the Jewish rulers hoped to save their place and nation, was the very cause for which the Lord sent the Roman army to destroy them. They crucified the Lord Jesus, according to the advice of Caiaphas; deeming it expedient rather to sacrifice him, than endanger the public safety; and it was by preventing the people believing in Jesus, and by putting him to death, that they filled up the measure of their iniquities, and drew down the vengeance of the Lord, which ended in the total destruction of their city—the demolition of their temple—and their own dispersion. For nearly eighteen hundred years, the Jews have been suffering under the fatal consequences of Caiaphas' advice; and they will remain in that outcast condition (yet withal miraculously preserved) until they shall "inhabit Jerusalem, their portion, in the Holy Land." † At present they stand as a warning beacon to those rulers of nations, who allow motives of expediency and carnal policy, to take the place of strict attention to the word of God. The Bible should be the Christian statesman's polar star;

* See chap. vii. 48. † See Zech. ii. 12. Amos ix. 14, 15.

and woe be to our country, if ever that fatal system of *expediency*, which already rears its head too high, becomes the ruling principle of government, and religion becomes of secondary importance, if not utterly excluded from her councils.

But is Caiaphas, also, among the prophets? Yes, the Lord gave a remarkable direction to his words, without any intention on his part to convey so much—while he only meant to say that Jesus should be put to death in order to save the nation from the Romans, God meant it as a prophecy, that Jesus should die to save his people from their sins. Jesus declares, that in the last day many shall say, "Lord! have we not prophesied in thy name," to whom he will answer—"I never knew you." We fear that Caiaphas and Balaam will be among the number; and if prophecy be no evidence of salvation, much less will a mere profession of Christianity. Look to your heart, and see if the Spirit of God has changed it; and look to your life, whether the fruits of that change are manifest. Till then, you have every reason to doubt your safety.

The feast of the passover being at hand, the utmost anxiety prevailed among the Jews, to know whether Jesus would attend. He did attend, for his time was come to deliver himself to the rage and malice of his enemies; and at this celebrated festival, he, the true Paschal Lamb, yielded up his life for the sake of his people.

CHAP. XII. 1—19.

MARY ANOINTS THE FEET OF JESUS—HE RIDES INTO JERUSALEM IN TOKEN OF FUTURE TRIUMPH.

Then Jesus, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper, and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always. Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put

Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus. On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna! Blessed *is* the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord! And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy king cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and *that* they had done these things unto him. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.

SIX days before the Passover, our Lord left the small town of Ephraim, to which he had retired from the rage of the Pharisees, and returned to Bethany, which was within two miles of Jerusalem.* Whilst he was there, a certain person invited him to his house, and Jesus was pleased to honour him with his presence. By comparing this account with that related in the 26th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, we find that the person who entertained our Lord on this occasion was "Simon the leper"—a different person from "Simon the Pharisee," at whose house his feet were anointed by a penitent woman.† The latter occurrence took place either at Nain or Capernaum; the former (related in this chapter) at Bethany. Upon this occasion, Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, was invited to meet our Lord; Martha discovered her attachment by waiting on him; and Mary testified her affectionate regard by anointing his feet with some precious ointment. This token of her love was considered too extravagant by the hypocrite Judas, who, under pretence of providing for the poor, would have enriched himself by the produce of it, if sold.‡ What astonishing forbearance did Jesus manifest in not exposing the wretch who could act with such duplicity! He merely justified Mary's

* Greswell has shewn that our Lord arrived at Bethany on the Saturday evening—just after the Sabbath had closed—on the eighth day of Nisan, the Passover being on the fourteenth—i. e. he arrived on our March 30. See Dissertation i. vol. iii.

† See Luke vii. 36.

‡ Judas held the bag—γλωσσόκομον—literally, a box for keeping the reeds of musical instruments, and afterwards applied to any box, casket, or bag for keeping money. At the Jewish feasts, the Jews generally formed themselves into a sodality, or company from ten to fourteen persons. One held the bag—to which all contributed, and from which the expenses of the sodality were defrayed, and the poor assisted; Judas doubtless sought this office that he might help himself, and therefore grudged Mary's expenditure in embalming (ενταφιασμον) her Saviour's body, in anticipation of his approaching death and burial.

conduct as more becoming his present condition, than if she had expended the amount in charitable purposes: she did for him, *then*, what the hastiness of his death would not allow others to do—she anointed his body for the burial: not with holy oil, as a religious rite, but with perfumed ointment, as an honorary custom. Let none censure others for their zealous exertions in the service of Christ, because their own indifference about religion would suppose them to be needless or extravagant. How rare is such love as that of Mary to her Lord and Saviour! Many profess a strong attachment to Christ, who will be at no expense in his service. This is a fruitless profession. Can you part with money and pleasure, for his sake, to advance the interests of religion—the spread of the Gospel—or to relieve the wants of his afflicted servants? Rather pray for the Spirit, which will enable you to act thus, than chide the zeal of those who do so.

When it was known in Jerusalem that Jesus was in the neighbourhood, a large concourse of people resorted from that city, to Bethany, not merely for his sake, but that they might have a sight of Lazarus, who was so wonderful a monument of his power and grace. But how true were the words which our Lord once uttered, that if men "believed not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Lazarus had risen from the dead, and yet so far were the Pharisees from being convinced by this miracle, that they were anxious to put him to death along with Jesus. Nothing but the grace of God will either remove the prejudices of men against the gospel, or make them desirous of sharing its blessings.

Our Lord being now on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, the people, as if by a miraculous impulse, manifested their joy by such tokens as were usual upon the arrival of a potent monarch, or a victorious general. Jesus submitted to these well-meant honours, because they served as a faint representation of that triumphal entry which Scripture leads us to expect he will yet make, when he shall come to ascend the throne of David, and, added to his many crowns, shall receive the crown of all the earth. He shall soon be revealed in all the splendour of his divine majesty, and shall "take to him his great power, and reign." "He shall bear the glory, and shall sit, and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne." * Satan

* Zech. vi. 13.

now reigns upon earth, by holding the hearts of the multitude in his ruinous sway; but in that day "the Lord (Jesus) shall be king over all the earth." * Would you bear a part in the joyful exultations of that day, when "the meek shall inherit the earth?" You must begin your song, now, in the house of your pilgrimage: you must have your old corrupt nature crucified, and Jesus enthroned in your heart. They only who die in faith, and "sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him."

The Pharisees, enraged at the manifestation of popular feeling towards Jesus, said among themselves, "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him." Events soon proved that they were hasty in this expression, for though the people now hailed Jesus as king, they soon cried, "Crucify him." But the words of the Pharisees shall yet be accomplished. The world shall yet go after him, for the "earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." † "All shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." Oh! scenes surpassing all conception, and yet true! May we so live by faith upon the Saviour now, that we may then partake of his glory.

NOTE on v. 15.—Quesnell well remarks on this verse, "This king comes not, amidst the terrors of thunders and lightning, to impose upon you the unsupportable yoke of a law of fear and death; he comes to bless you with a law of life and love, which is received only in proportion as it is loved, and which with a most winning gentleness engages us to love and embrace it. Reign in me, O Lord, by causing me to love thy law."—Reflections on the New Testament, vol. ii. p. 708.

CHAP. XII. 20—50.

GREEKS DESIRE TO SEE JESUS—HE FORETELLETH HIS DEATH—HIS PRAYER—THE CONDEMNATION OF ALL WHO REMAIN IN SATAN'S BONDAGE.

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which *was* of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and

* Zech. xiv. 9. † Isaiah xi. 9.

what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying,* I have both glorified *it,* and will glorify *it* again. The people therefore that stood by and heard *it,* said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, the Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him,* lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me, seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself: but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

AMONG the many who went up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast, were some pious Greeks—Gentiles whose desire of being acquainted with Christ at this moment of his greatest humiliation, was the more remarkable. They came to Philip, saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus;" a worthy object of search, a friend worth knowing. We should seek him in all the ordinances of his house, in private prayer, in his holy word: but remember that in vain we attend the house of prayer, and in vain partake of the Christian passover, unless we purposely go to see Jesus. The prospect of the addition to his church from among the Gentiles, made our Lord declare that he was glorified by the ingathering of these first fruits. The manner of its accom-

plishment he explains by an image borrowed from nature. If a grain of wheat be not sown, and thus, in a manner, become dead and buried, it will remain unproductive—it will "abide alone" a single grain. But when put into the earth, it dies for a short time, and then springs up with a great increase. Thus did Jesus. He submitted to the laws of mortality. He lay in the grave, like seed under the clods; but as the seed comes up again, green, and fresh, and fruitful—so Christ, by dying and reviving again, became the root, from which numbers derive life. The salvation of all believers is the result of the dying of this corn of wheat.* Are you deriving nourishment from Christ the root? If so, you shall be among the harvest of believers; the wheat—the living grain—shall be gathered into the barn in safety; but the chaff shall be burned with fire unquenchable. Two tests are here afforded whereby to judge of yourself. Do you so love Christ that you are ready to follow him through danger and persecution, and to die in his cause, if need be? And do you, like a faithful servant, obey his commands, and do his will *from the heart*, "not by constraint, but willingly?" Let each now judge himself, that he be not judged of the Lord.

The twenty-seventh verse may be understood far better by reading it in the way of a question. "What! shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour." † The feelings of his human nature would have suggested a prayer for deliverance, but his will was brought into full subjection to the divine will, and therefore he would not pray to avoid death, even though his soul was troubled—his only petition was, "Father, glorify thy name." Immediately a voice from heaven bore testimony that the Father's glory was secured; and if secured by the Saviour's sufferings, how much more so shall it be again, by the Saviour's appearance in glory! While the astonished multitude wondered at the sound, Jesus remarked that this testimony was given, not for his further assurance of the Father's love, but for the confirmation of *their* faith. He then added these remarkable words, "Now is the judgment of this world; *now* shall the prince of this world be cast out." The condemnation of the world arises chiefly from their rejection of a crucified Saviour; hence judgment may

* See Isaiah liii. 11, 12.

† This is taking no improper liberty with the sacred text; we should never forget that the division of the Bible into chapters and verses, though very convenient, is merely human. The mode of punctuation can claim no higher authority.

be said to be passed, though it is not executed; the victory which Jesus obtained over Satan on the cross, is the way in which the sinner is set free,* and Satan cast out of the believer's heart—and this is a pledge and token of the final casting out of the great adversary of the church, at the Lord's coming.† Christ has been "lifted" up on the painful and ignominious cross, but this, instead of destroying his designs of mercy, is the great way of effecting them. The cross has a magnetic influence on every soul touched by God's Spirit—the affections and desires of men of all ranks and conditions feel the attractive power of the cross—they are drawn to God by a gracious constraint.

Our Lord's intimation of his approaching death, was considered by some of the Jews present, as a conclusive argument against his being the Messiah, for they had read in the Scripture that Messiah should abide for ever, and this they could not reconcile with his suffering death. Both Jews and Christians have fallen into a grievous mistake respecting the Messiah. The Jews overlook those passages which speak of his *first* coming in humiliation, and are still expecting a glorious Messiah. Christians too often overlook his *second* coming in glory, and think that all the prophecies which relate to his humiliation have been literally fulfilled, but those that refer to his second coming and kingdom—to the restoration of the Jews, &c., they frequently regard in a figurative sense. This is one great reason of the ignorance that exists about the prophetic Scriptures, and the little interest there is about the glorious advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord was not pleased to answer the cavils of the Jews at this time, but cautioned them seriously against trifling away the opportunity of instruction which his presence afforded them. Jesus is "come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in him should not *abide* in darkness;" by which we learn, that those who do not believe, do abide in darkness. Faith in God's promises is the fruit of the Spirit in the heart. A state of unbelief is a state of darkness. Jesus is come to deliver man from this darkness. Has he delivered *you?* "Yet a little while is the light with you." You should praise the Lord who has not sealed your fate by death. "Walk while you have the light," lest the darkness of death overtake you. All hope of salvation will then be passed, if you die in unbelief, for "there is no repentance in the grave, whither thou goest."

* Col. ii. 14. † Rev. xx. 2, 3.

Many of the Jewish rulers felt a strong conviction in their minds, that Jesus was the Messiah; but they dared not avow their conviction, because a public confession of him would have brought upon them severe reproach and persecution, and they were more anxious to preserve their reputation with men, than obtain the favour of God. How wretched their case! and yet, how many now are like them, who are more afraid of the world's opinion than God's anger. Such, surely, disgrace their profession, and prove themselves destitute of the love of God. Jesus took another opportunity of delivering a solemn admonition to the Jews. He asserted his divine mission, and his union with the Father. He declared himself the grand luminary of mankind, who will communicate light to all sincere inquirers, and guide their feet into the way of peace. Yet, though the intent of his first appearing was to procure salvation rather than pronounce judgment, he warned them that unbelievers shall not escape, but shall be condemned in the last day, by that word which they now contemptuously reject. Yes, that word contained in God's book, which we daily read, shall stand in judgment against us, if we neglect the promises of pardon through Christ, or make light of the threatenings which it contains. May the Lord enable us to "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls."

NOTE on v. 41.—"Seeing the prophet (Isaiah vi. 1—5,) is so express that it was the Lord of hosts—the king Jehovah—whose glory he then saw—and yet the Evangelist declares he spake these things when he saw the glory of Christ; it follows—that Christ must be one with Jehovah."—*Whitby.*

CHAP. XIII. 1—20.

CHRIST AT THE LAST PASSOVER—WASHES HIS DISCIPLES' FEET—THE DESIGN OF THIS ACTION.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, (the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray him,) Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that, he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter said unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him: therefore said he, ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord: neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled. He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.

We are now called to contemplate the Saviour and his little band of apostles assembled at the last passover that he celebrated on earth. He first partook of the paschal supper, according to the custom of the Jews; and then instituted the Lord's Supper,* as the sacramental token of his love and of our union with him. Between these rites he condescended to the menial office of washing his disciples' feet. Though conscious of his great dignity as the Supreme Lord who came down from the highest heaven, and was about to return thither, he designed to exhibit a further instance of his deep humiliation. He, therefore, rose from supper, and put himself into the habit of a menial servant, that he might minister to his disciples; and He, who was Lord of all, stooped to the lowest office, while with his own hands he washed their feet. In what a habit—in what an attitude do we now behold Jesus! Whom would a stranger have taken for the lowest of the company, but Him who was high over all created nature? † It was not more a personal attatchment to his disciples, than a regard to the edification of his whole church, which engaged him to this astonishing action; that all his ministers—that all his people, in conformity to his example, might learn a readiness to serve each other in love. It is not necessary to act in the same precise manner in order to follow Christ's example. If we are willing in love and humility to serve Christ's members—not seeking to exalt self, but "in

* See Luke xxii. 19, 20.

† 'Thou hast overcome, O Lord, thou hast overcome my pride—this example has mastered me.'—*Bernard.*

honour preferring one another"—then do we imitate the great pattern of condescension here afforded us.

But this act of our Lord's had a further meaning, than as an example of humility. His conversation with Peter respecting it, fully shows that it was a significant action, intended to represent the nature and efficacy of that grace, by which he purifies his people from their natural pollution. Peter, struck with wonder at our Lord's condescension, at first refused submission, saying, "Lord, dost *thou* wash *my* feet?" Jesus, in order to try his submission and implicit obedience, deferred an explanation of his conduct till his work was finished. He said to him, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Often does the Lord try his people in this manner; but while they have the promise that "all things shall work together for their good," they may feel sure, that when his purposes are fully unfolded, it shall appear that love and mercy directed every trial for their spiritual welfare. Peter, however, not viewing the matter in this light, still positively refused submission, saying, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Here was a show of humility and modesty. Peter, doubtless, had a great respect for his master. But under this show of humility, there was a real contradiction to the will of the Lord Jesus. It is not humility, but unbelief, to put away the offers of the Gospel, as if too rich to be made use of, or too good news to be true. Upon this our Lord declared the necessity of a spiritual washing, of which this act was significant. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Peter having once caught the idea that a spiritual washing was intended, now desires a total purification, saying, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head;" but he is reminded that a person once washed or justified, as *he* then was, needed not a second plunge in the cleansing fountain, as if unclean and unpardoned, but only required to have that uncleanness removed which he may have contracted in the course of his daily walk through life; as a person who has just come out of a bath, needs not to bathe again, but only to wipe off the dirt which might adhere to his feet on stepping out of it.

Three important points of practical instruction are here presented to us. *First*, the necessity of a spiritual washing, of which the water in baptism is the outward sign. We need to be washed in the blood of Jesus, and to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Whoever has recived the Holy Spirit, will manifest the fruits of the Spirit in his life,* and whoever does not pro-

* See Gal. v. 22—24.

duce these fruits, or produces the opposite ones, indulges a vain hope of having been spiritually washed. Jesus says to *you*, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." The Holy Spirit is the agent which makes over to the believer the merits of Jesus; and till that Spirit is received, you have neither lot nor part in all that Jesus has done. He now stands ready to cleanse your guilty soul; "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full!" *Secondly*, we learn that he who is once washed is washed *for ever*. See here what is the comfort and privilege of those who are in a justified state: they are washed by Christ, and "are clean every wit:" though sinners, conscious of unnumbered transgressions and omissions, yet they have fled to the cleansing fountain of a Saviour's blood, and have been "washed, justified, and sanctified," and are now made members of that spiritual Church, which Christ shall present to the Father, "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing—holy and without blemish."* Nothing shall sever them from Christ's pardoning grace—this is, like himself, unchangeable and firm—it is true of all Christ's disciples, as well as the apostles—that "having loved his own, he loves them to the end." *Thirdly*, we see the necessity of a daily application for pardon, even for those who may be said to be already pardoned. The priests under the law, when they were consecrated, were washed with water; and though they did not afterwards need to be so washed all over, yet whenever they went in to minister, they were obliged to wash their feet and hands at the brazen laver, on pain of death.† Thus the Christian, though pardoned and sanctified, yet by treading on the ground he fouleth his feet again,—that is, by conversing with worldly affairs, he defiles his affections. Wherefore Christ must needs wash our feet, daily by his intercession, and we must wash our own feet, by directing our spiritual walk aright, and by praying for daily pardon, even as we are taught to say, "Forgive us our trespasses.‡" We must fly continually to the blood of Jesus, and plead it daily when we come to appear in the presence of the Lord.

NOTE v. 1.—προ δέ τῆς ἑορτῆς—"Now before the feast," &c. compared with Ch. xviii. 28, shews that Christ and his disciples eat their paschal supper before the "preparation," and therefore before the ordinary day of slaying the paschal lamb, i. e. the 14th of Nisan.—See Greswell's lucid Dissertation, vol. iii. 469.

* Eph. v. 27.

† See Exod. xxx. 19, 20.

‡ Augustine, Tract. lv. in Johan.

CHAP. XIII. 21—38.

JUDAS' TREACHERY DECLARED—JOHN INQUIRES ABOUT THE TRAITOR—CHRIST GIVES A TOKEN—EXHORTS TO MUTUAL LOVE—FOREWARNS PETER OF HIS DENIAL.

When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped *it*. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son of* Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some *of them* thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy *those things* that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop, went immediately out: and it was night. Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now: but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice.

In our Lord's conversation with Peter, recorded in the preceding part of this chapter, he intimated his acquaintance with Judas' treachery, when he said, "ye are clean, but not all." Now again he repeats it in less studied language, deeming it expedient that his disciples should be apprised of the diabolical plan, then ripe for execution, that they might not be staggered when they saw one from among themselves so scandalously desert his post; but he confirmed them in their faith by observing a fulfilment of Scripture in the event. He therefore plainly said to them, "One of you shall betray me." Little is it to be wondered at, that on hearing this, "they looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake." What self command must Judas

have possessed, when his countenance did not betray him at this trying moment!

The zeal of Peter would not let him rest under so doubtful an imputation, nor can he be happy till he knows the traitor; but fearing to inquire openly, he makes signs to John to obtain the information, who, as he reclined next to Jesus, lay with his head upon the Saviour's breast. John himself tells us that "perfect love casteth out fear," * that is, when it is strong and vigorous; and so it proved on this occasion: conscious of possessing the Saviour's love, and knowing his own regard for Christ, he fearlessly said unto him, "Lord, who is it?" We say not that Peter wanted a share in the Saviour's love, but we say that John possessed brighter views of it, and had greater enjoyment of it—he leaned on the bosom of love, and drank in the spirit of his Master; the more we are conscious of a Saviour's love, and the more that love possesses us, the greater boldness shall we have in holding communion with Christ. Jesus immediately said, "he it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it," and he gave the sop to Judas. How unwilling was our Lord to point him out by name! all is expressed by dumb signs: the hand speaks what the tongue would not, and in the same language in which Peter asked the question, did the Saviour return a reply. But what a sign does our Lord employ! A stranger would have thought that the person who was served out of the Saviour's dish, was the highest in his favour; whereas the only one whom he frowned upon, was the one to whom he first gave the sop.† Let us learn that the outward gifts of God are not always tokens of his love—often they are the contrary. We should covet earnestly those inward and spiritual graces, which can raise us above the regret, or even the desire, of temporal advancement.

Our blessed Lord now addressed Judas in language, intelligible only to himself; he says, "that thou doest, do quickly," meaning that he should hasten his treacherous design; yet this plain proof of the Saviour's having knowledge of his crime, does not appear to have stung the heart of Judas with terror or

* 1 John iv. 18.

† ψωμίον—sop, or broken piece of the loaf, such as were given to the guests after the paschal supper as tokens of mutual charity. This was Judas' last opportunity—he disregarded it and left the company, after receiving the consecrated bread of the Lord's Supper, but not the cup; nor did he hear those precious words of consolation given in the xiv. xv. and xvi. chapters. Thus his partial reception of this holy sacrament exhibits his guilt in the most aggravated degree. See Greswell's Dissertation, vol. iii, p. 115—118.

remorse; he went out immediately, though it was night, and planned the scheme for his Master's death. We exclaim against the treachery of Judas; but let us look within, and ask, do we never abandon the Saviour's cause to his enemies, for the trifling gratification of some worthless and worldly object? After Judas had gone out, our Lord exulted in the prospect of those blessed consequences which would result from the treachery of Judas, as the means of completing the grand work of redemption. He reminded the disciples, that the hour was approaching, when he himself should enter on a state of exaltation, and bring glory to God, in saving sinners by his death. Then looking upon his dear followers with a tenderness of affection, like an indulgent father upon his little children, from whom he was on the point of being separated, he pressed upon them as his dying request, that they would continue firmly and warmly attached to one another. This he enjoined as a *new* commandment—not unknown, indeed, in former dispensations, but now enforced by fresh motives, and by an example altogether singular in its kind: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; *as* I have loved you, that ye also love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." His love to us, then, is to be the *cause*, the *measure*, and the *pattern* of our love to all the members of his Church. Judging ourselves by this test of love, are we the disciples of Jesus? We must not only show the appearance of love, but we must *have* it. Brotherly love is the badge of Christ's disciples: by this he knows them; by this they know themselves;* and by this others may know them: so that they who do not feel a love for the people of Christ, may reasonably doubt whether they have an interest in the love of Jesus.

Our Lord had intimated his approaching departure, on which Peter, though admonished that he could not follow him for the present, declared his readiness to attend him through all dangers, even to death itself. Alas! little do we know how we shall be able to stand in the hour of trial. Jesus upbraids him with his self-confidence: "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?" He put him upon his second thoughts, not that he might retract his resolution, but that he might modestly insert this necessary proviso, "Lord," thy grace enabling me, "I will lay down my life for thy sake." He then reproved the boasting apostle, and

* 1 John iii. 14.

informed him that before the crowing cock should announce the morning's light, his strong confidence should be so shaken, that he would deny having any connexion with his Lord and Master. Christ not only foresaw that Judas would betray him, though he only, in heart, designed it; but he foresaw that Peter would deny him, though he resolutely vowed to act contrarily. He knows not only the wickedness of sinners, but the weaknesses of saints. The most secure are generally the least safe, and those most shamefully betray their own weakness, who most confidently presume upon their own strength.*

CHAP. XIV. 1—14.

CHRIST COMFORTS HIS DISCIPLES—THE MANSIONS OF GLORY, AND THE WAY TO THEM—PRAYER ENJOINED.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I spake unto you I speak not of myself but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do! because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do *it*.

THIS chapter is a continuation of our Lord's discourse with his disciples, after the celebration of the last passover, and at the institution of that Christian sacrament which was to succeed in its place. The solemn service, together with the warnings then addressed to the disciples, could not fail to make a deep impression on their minds. They were weighed down with sorrow at this time, because of their Lord's expected departure, which he had

* See 1 Cor. x. 12.

just made known to them, as also the manner in which he should be betrayed by one of their own company; and because of the persecutions which he led them to expect after his departure. For each of these causes of sorrow, their affectionate Master provided suitable comfort in this chapter; and though the words were primarily intended for them, yet are they so framed as to be a source of comfort to all the sorrowing children of God, from that time to the present. This may be regarded as a consolatory discourse; and when our hearts are troubled and cast down, we have only to build on the ground of comfort here presented, and we shall not sink even in the deepest waters.

Our Lord tells his disciples that they need not lament, "as those without hope," for that in his Father's house were many mansions, and that he was going to prepare a place for them. The "many mansions" may refer to the ample space, or to the different degrees in future glory; both views are, indeed, true, and should have their proper place; but as it best comported with our Lord's design, to refer here to "the vast multitude which no man can number," * we may suppose that he alludes to that kingdom which cannot be moved, and which is for the saved of all nations. Thus they were taught to dwell on eternal things instead of temporal—the very term "mansions," showing the perpetuity of the habitation of the saints, in opposition to all the kingdoms and possessions of this passing and transitory world. To take real comfort in the prospect of our Father's house, we ought to feel that his presence is better than life, and that holiness is happiness—"we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened"—sin and sorrow go together—the believer is indeed holy, but not perfectly so—indwelling sin often hinders his enjoyment of God, and makes him long for the time when he shall have done with this body of sin. When the disembodied spirit is summoned by death into the presence of God, the believer is emancipated from the conflict, and is called into the element of perfect holiness—he dwells with his Saviour in uninterrupted soul-communion, and mingles with "the spirits of just men made perfect." † This may be called the first step of the throne of glory, but the crown is reserved for the Lord's personal coming; and, therefore, he gives the disciples the blessed assurance, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." It would be no glory without Christ himself—we "shall see him as he is, and be like him"—in soul,

* Rev. vii. 9. † Heb. xii. 23.

when we die and leave this poor tabernacle—in body also, when he shall change "our vile body" and make it "like unto his glorious one" in the morning of the resurrection.* This will be the perfection of the Redeemer's triumph, of the glorious kingdom, and of the saints' blessedness; the prospect of which may well console us in every trial and sorrow.

The disciples, at that time, had very obscure views; it appears from the answer of Thomas, that they were ignorant of the *way* to the New Jerusalem: our Lord, therefore, gives them full instruction as to the mode of obtaining the blessing, and declares, in words never to be forgotten, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Truth lies between the way and the life, as if to shew that the way to life was through the truth. Every word here is emphatic—let us prove their meaning, by entering on this way, holding this truth, and aiming at this life.† He is the "way" in a two-fold sense—by him we have access to the Father's favour and presence, for he is the only mediator between God and man.‡ No prayer can ascend with acceptance but in his name—no service be received by the Father, except as it passes through the hands of the great Advocate. He is also the way to the kingdom of glory; in ourselves, we have no claim to the mansions in our Father's house; but quite the reverse—we deserve the anger and condemnation of a holy God. Jesus, has, therefore, the sole glory of delivering sinners from the pit of destruction, and of making them heirs of the eternal inheritance. In his righteousness we can appear before God, and claim those unfading realities, of which his ascension and exaltation are a pledge—for he is gone as our forerunner "to prepare a place for us."§ We may well, therefore, regard him as the "truth," because the sum and substance of the Bible; in him the types and shadows of the law are completed, even as all the prophecies are fulfilled in him. He is also our "life"—the quickening power by which we live to God, and are enabled to receive the truth, and walk in this safe and happy way. In a word, "Christ is all:" our present stay and refuge, and the ultimate end of all our hopes and joys. May each of us find it so by daily experience.

The "greater works" which Jesus said his disciples should perform after his departure, meant that greater miracles should be performed by the apostles after the outpouring of the Spirit, than were done by our Lord during his three years' ministry.‖

* Phil. iii. 21.
† Ambrose.
‡ 1 Tim. ii. 5.
§ See Heb. vi. 2.
‖ These miracles exceeded our Lord's: 1. In nature—as in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. 2. In number—for there was a longer time. 3. In objects—for

It seems also to refer to the greater success which should attend the preaching of the Gospel by his servants, than did attend his personal ministry on earth; this was exemplified at the day of Pentecost, when more were converted by one sermon of the apostle Peter, than by all the discourses of Christ. This honour belonged to the Holy Spirit, whose office is the quickening of sinners to spiritual life, even as Christ's was the great work of redeeming them. Observe with what confidence in his possession of divine power Jesus says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will *I* do." How could he do that which was asked, if he did not hear prayer? and how could he hear prayer at all times if he were not God? God's glory is manifested by this mode of answering prayer—his justice, holiness, and love, are all displayed in the intercession of Christ; and we have herein the most abundant encouragement to draw near to the throne of grace—Jesus has pledged himself to answer all real, believing petitions. Oh! let us put him to the test—let us expect his gracious reply to our requests, and we shall find that no earnest suitors are sent empty away.

CHAP. XIV. 15—31.

THE COMFORTER PROMISED—CHRIST'S MANIFESTATION TO BELIEVERS—TRUE PEACE IN HIM.

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him: for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being *yet* present with you. But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy

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the Gentiles, as well as Jews, were included. 4. In effect—for more were moved by them to join the Christian Church. This is not to the disparagement of the great Master, but in accordance with the divine counsel. See Lampe on St. John, vol. iii. p. 131.

Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come *again* unto you, If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so do I. Arise, let us go hence.

It was stated in the preceding lecture that one of the causes for the disciples' sorrow, was the departure of their Lord and Master; and under this bereavement were they consoled by the words which have just been read. Jesus promised that his absence should be supplied by the Holy Spirit, which should act as another comforter, and which should abide with them for ever, teaching them all things, and bringing all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them. This promise we know was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. By the strength of the Spirit then imparted, they were enabled to stand forward boldly in defence of the Gospel, having received more comfort and light than they ever enjoyed while their Lord was upon earth.

But as much of what our Lord said on this occasion is capable of being applied to the true believer, it may be more profitable to consider it in this view. We may therefore remark, that to all believers there is a promise given of the comforting influence of the Holy Spirit, which shall abide with them for ever. This is implied in the title given to the blessed *Comforter*—a name which imports the work he effects in the Christian. Sin has robbed man of the joy of God's presence, and removed him far from the only source of happiness; guilt has seized on his conscience, and sorrow follows in the train. Jesus, as the Redeemer, has removed the barrier that Adam's fall had set up between God and his creatures—justice is satisfied, and the demands of the law answered. In this view, Christ, as our kinsman, was our Redeemer and Comforter; but we need *another* Comforter to teach and quicken, or we can neither see nor taste the blessings of redemption. This the Spirit does—he opens the heart to receive Christ—directs the eye of faith to the fulness of his atoning work—guilt is removed from the conscience, and the child of God is "filled with joy and peace in

believing;* yea, he thus obtains the spirit of adoption, and he is able to look up to God, and say, "Abba, Father."† This may explain our Lord's promise, "I will not leave you comfortless," or, as the word literally means, I will not leave you "*orphans*." The case of true believers, though sometimes it may be sorrowful, yet is never comfortless, because God is their Father, and he is an everlasting Father, so that they can never be orphans.

The Christian lives by faith upon his Saviour. He holds daily intercourse with him by prayer, and thus receives secret supplies of grace, which forms the comfort that supports his soul in the darkest hour of trial. He is united to Christ. "Because Christ lives, he shall live also." Christ is pledged to support him. His interests—his pleasures—his all are bound up in one common cause with Christ. The closest relationship on earth is used to represent the union between Christ and a believing soul; and the love which is created by this union, is the motive which influences the active zeal of the believer. "If a man love me," says Christ, "he will keep my words," and, "he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." This manifestation, he afterwards explains, is not to the bodily eye, but to the soul of the believer. The Lord condescends to dwell there by the gracious power and influence of the Holy Spirit. If he manifested his glory in Solomon's temple, much more in the renewed heart which is said to be his "house."‡ He lights up the lamp of truth there, and by his gracious presence diffuses love, joy, and peace within. The thoughtless, worldly person knows as little what this means, as Jude did, when he inquired, "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" As long as a person is "of the world," and follows its ways, so long is he in ignorance of the meaning of this chapter: but when he turns his back upon the world, and embraces the Gospel, he then knows by happy experience, what Christ means by "manifesting himself" unto his believing people, and by "making his abode" with them: till then, he can neither have comfort nor safety.

The remedy for the last-mentioned cause of sorrow which seized the disciples, seems to be pointed out in the 27th verse. They dreaded the persecution which they were led to expect; but Jesus promises them "peace:" and we can appeal to the

* Rom. xv. 13. † Rom. viiii. 14, 15. ‡ Heb. iii. 6.

experience of every Christian who has felt "the peace of God," and ask whether it is not sufficient to support him in—nay, to make him triumph over—every degree of bodily suffering, or of worldly adversity. "The peace of God" is unlike that of the world. The one is everlasting and sure, the other, transient and uncertain: the one is real, solid, substantial peace—the other is only a false peace, which is derived from the ignorance of danger. Worldly persons could not enjoy a moment's happiness if they saw what is before them, and it is always interrupted if they look beyond the grave; whereas the Christian's greatest peace flows from the contemplation of his future inheritance: it is never so great as when he is most abstracted from worldly things. Christ gave some peculiar legacies, but *this* in common—his garments to the soldiers, his mother to the beloved disciple, but peace to the whole Church. A blessed legacy,—it is the serenity of mind—the tranquillity of soul—the simplicity of the heart—the band of love and the consort of charity,—neither can he come to the inheritance of the Lord, that will not keep the testament of peace, neither can he be at concord with Christ, that will be at discord with the Christian.*

Christ lastly spoke of his departure,—of his triumph over the prince of this world, and of his love to the Father; and that he might prove beyond a doubt how great that love was, he calls upon the disciples to follow him: as if he had said, "Arise, let us go hence"—come to Calvary, and you shall see "that I love the Father," and that "as he has given me commandment, even so I do." Let *us* follow the Saviour to Calvary, and we shall see the most astonishing proof of his love, and of God's hatred of sin. Let us go there to weep for our sins, and let us pray that the blood which was shed there, may cleanse us from the guilt and power of sin.

NOTE on v. 28.—The Arians endeavoured to shew from this verse that Christ had a deity inferior to the Father. The orthodox Fathers, in reply, referred it wholly to Christ's humanity, but not well, says Calvin, it is clear that Christ spoke as Mediator, and in that sense was inferior to the Father.—See his note in loco.

* Augustine.

CHAP. XV 1—15.

CHRIST THE TRUE VINE—THE BAD AND GOOD BRANCHES—THE PRUNING OF THE HUSBANDMAN—LOVE TO THE BRETHREN ENJOINED.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

ALTHOUGH our blessed Lord had called upon his disciples to arise and follow him out of the guest-chamber, where the Passover had been celebrated, where his last sacrament had been instituted, and where he had just been comforting them under their sorrows; yet, with a tardiness usual to those who are parting from their friends, he delayed to pronounce the last farewell; and while on the very point of moving, while even hastening to reach Calvary, he addressed to them the contents of this, and the two following chapters. The last words of a dying friend leave a peculiar impression upon the hearts of those to whom they are addressed; and these last words of Christ, were doubtless received as a parting legacy by the disciples, as they have been ever since by succeeding Christians—a legacy containing a greater treasure than "thousands of gold and silver."

In order to shew the disciples the necessity of continual dependence on him, Jesus represented himself and his Church under the similitude of a vine, planted and cultivated by a wise

and careful husbandman. Christ is the root and stock of the tree, and his professing people are its branches. Some of which are beautifully adorned with leaves, but produce no fruit; these are cut off, and consigned to the flames as fit only to be used for fuel. Such is the state and character of mere nominal Christians, and such will be their final destruction: they are members of the visible Church; their appearances are fair and promising, but their barrenness witnesses against them, and therefore they are "nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." * And thus is fulfilled the denunciation of the Lord against false professors: "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." †

There are, however, branches of another sort, truly excellent and valuable, which, in consequence of nourishment derived from the root, bear a large increase. Such, our Lord testified, were all the apostles, after Judas had left the company. Such, likewise, are all true believers: by faith they are joined to the Saviour, and by that union, they receive an influence, which renders them, though in different degrees, "fruitful in every good work." They, therefore, ascribe all their attainments or usefulness to Christ: if left to themselves, or separated from him, they can no more be productive of good, than the branches of the vine, when cut off from the stock; but whilst they keep up a constant communication with Jesus, and derive spiritual nourishment from him by prayer, and the reading of his word, their spiritual growth is increased, and they make advancement in holiness. Nothing, then, can better illustrate this close and living union, than the tree and its branches. The sap represents the Spirit of God, which flows from Christ to his members, and then they become fruitful and useful—they bear a lovely cluster—even all the fruits of the Spirit, "which are by Jesus Christ,—unto the glory and praise of God." ‡ Yet, even these valuable branches stand in need of being *pruned*, otherwise the fruit will be small and sickly. For this purpose the Father acts like the husbandman. Oh, what care does it require to lop off those excrescences and irregularities, which shoot forth even from eminent believers! The Lord, who loves them, spares them not, but appoints the heaviest afflictions, with no other design than to render them more heavenly-minded, and, consequently, more honourable and useful members of his

* Heb. vi. 8. † Matt. xv. 13. ‡ Phil. i. 11.

church. Do you perceive your own character exhibited in this parable? Have you anything more than an external profession of Christianity? If you expect to be fruitful in good works, without a saving faith in Christ, it is as foolish an expectation, as if you spoke of reaping corn before you sowed the seed. Faith is the seed—works are the fruits. Do you speak of having faith, and are you still unholy in your practice? Your boast is vain, for "faith without works is dead."

After this, Jesus, who is love itself, discourses with his disciples concerning love; and in examining his words, we shall find that he speaks first of the love of the Father towards him, and next, of his own love to his disciples: "as the Father hath loved me, *so have I loved you.*" The proofs of this love are abundant: "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." If "all that a man hath, he will give for his life," he that gives *that* for his friend, can afford no greater evidence of his deep and sincere affection. But the excellency of Christ's love above all others, is proved, when we consider the persons for whom he died. Some rare instances have occurred, where a man sacrificed his life for the sake of his friend, but—love unparalleled—unbounded—Jesus died to save his enemies.* He regarded the rebellious, guilty sons of men with such tender compassion, that he died to deliver them from the wrath to come—so that he treated them as friends when they deserved to be punished as enemies; and in due time, he touches their hard hearts, and fills them with love to him. Then are they really his friends, and they prove their affection for him, by keeping his words. This sense of unmerited mercy towards them, is the source of their love to Jesus. They "love him, because he first loved" them; † and their willing obedience testifies their love, according to the words of Christ, "ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." They also prove their obedience to Jesus by their love to each other, for Jesus has said, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you,"—holding out to them his own love as a model for theirs, whilst he presents to them the most prevailing motive. If we do not love the brethren, or those who belong to Christ, we give the clearest proof that we have no part in him. Let us pray for this most excellent gift of charity, and let us seek so to be united to Christ the living vine,

* See Rom. v. 8. † 1 John iv. 19.

that gratitude may beget love to him, and to all the members of his mystical body.

NOTE 1.—"I am the true vine." It has been much doubted why Christ selected this tree. Lightfoot thinks, because the Eucharist and therefore the juice of the grape was dwelt upon. Hutcheson and others draw out points of similitude between the vine and Christ.—See also Poole's Synopsis.

NOTE 2, verse 11. is rendered by some—"These things have I spoken, that my joy in you might remain, and that your joy (in me) might be complete." See Valpy's Greek Testament, vol. ii. p. 90, and also Rosenmüller's scholia on this text.

CHAP. XV. 16—27.

CHRIST'S CHOICE OF HIS PEOPLE—PRACTICAL TENDENCY OF THIS DOCTRINE—THE WORLD HATES CHRIST'S DISCIPLES.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But *this cometh to pass*, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

THE heart of man is naturally so averse to the things of God, that it is necessary he should be instructed by the Holy Spirit before he is disposed to receive those truths which the Bible contains. No doctrine, for example, is more unpalatable to the generality of men, than the doctrine of election; yet it is a doctrine unquestionably stated in the Bible, and clearly expressed in the first verse of this portion of Scripture, where Jesus says to his disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit;" which shews that our Lord did not intend an

election to office, but to holiness, and through it to eternal life.* It is evident that the choice must begin on one side or the other—man must first select God as his portion, or God must first show favour to man. Now this text, with many others, determines the question: the election begins with the God of all grace—man, by nature, will not, and therefore cannot come to Christ, "except the Father draw him;"†—hence the choice and calling originate with the divine will, which effectually works on the hearts of God's people—and this is, simply, the doctrine of election. Perhaps you say that you cannot understand this doctrine, and therefore will not believe it. Do you understand the doctrine of the Trinity? and yet you believe it, because it is revealed in the word of God; just for the same reason should you believe this, though you can understand the one no more than the other. The *whys* and the *wherefores* of God's dealings must not be scrutinized; but "those things which are revealed belongs to us:" God has revealed this doctrine, therefore we are bound to believe it. Why did God choose the Jews, and not the Gentiles, in the Old Testament dispensation? Why, from among the Jews, did he select Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Why did he choose our nation to hear the gospel, and withhold it from the heathen? Why did he provide a Saviour for fallen man, and not for fallen angels?‡ Why did he call Matthew, John, Peter, and the other apostles, when they had no idea of choosing him? We cannot tell, yet we know that he *did* thus act, and all we can say is, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight?"

A popular objection to this doctrine is, that it allows a man to live as he pleases. The words of our Lord refute this opinion: he says, "I have chosen you and ordained you *that ye should go and bring forth fruit*;" and St. Paul says of believers, God "hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy*, and without blame before him, in love."§ When God ordains men to eternal life, he also determines that they should walk in the path of holiness—if, therefore any professors of religion are destitute of the fruits of holiness, they can have no evidence of their interest in the election of grace. Another objection is, that if God is to do all, man need do nothing. This, too, is contradicted by Scripture, for though God is the source of all blessing, yet as he works by *means*, he requires that man should use the means,

* Eph. ii. 10.
† Ch. vi. 44.
‡ See 2 Peter ii. 4.
§ Eph. i. 4.

in order to obtain the end. Prayer, for example, is his appointed ordinance, and God has promised great blessings to those who pray in faith. But though man has nothing to boast of, after he uses the proper means, yet if he refuses to use them, he has nobody to blame but himself for the consequences. Thus all the glory of man's salvation belongs to God alone, who makes the means effectual; while all the misery attendant upon a neglect of them, is chargeable upon him who refuses to use them: and while it is true that God chooses some to salvation, it is equally true that not a single individual shall be lost, who casts himself upon Christ, with a full desire of being saved by his atoning blood.

The remaining part of this chapter contains a repeated declaration of those warnings and promises which our Lord had already given to his disciples; the grounds on which he teaches them to expect hatred from the world, are such as apply equally to all the comfort which his promises of support are capable of affording. Well does our Lord enjoin them to love one another, for if they be not united in affection to each other, they will in vain look for any love in the world. The world calls them enthusiasts and hypocrites, and assigns these as the reasons of its enmity against them. But Jesus, who knows the secrets of all hearts, has here declared the true cause of its enmity against his people—their separation from the world: "*because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world,* THEREFORE, *the world hateth you.*" 'Tis true the hatred of the world is not to be desired; you should rather make men love you, if possible; but if their friendship is to be bought by your forsaking the *least* of God's commandments, you must at once forego it, and you may cheerfully meet their opposition, knowing that your Master endured it before, and that "the Comforter" can support you under every trial.

NOTE on v. 19.—"To separate us from this lost world, we are chosen out of it, not by merit of our own, for we had no merits to begin with; not by nature, which was radically corrupt, but by grace."—*Augustine.*

CHAP. XVI. 1—15.

CHRIST'S DISCIPLES FOREWARNED OF TRIBULATION—THE SPIRIT PROMISED AS A REPROVER AND COMFORTER.

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to him that sent me: and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

OUR Lord here more particularly foretels the future sufferings of his disciples. How strong are the arguments which this chapter affords, in proof of the divine mission of the Lord Jesus. Who but one that was acquainted with futurity, would venture to predicts events, which, if they failed, would have ruined his cause? Who that was an impostor would have kept back *all* promises of temporal prosperity from his followers, and have thus faithfully related the excessive sufferings which they should meet with, even to their lives' end? And who could have been found fools enough to spend their lives in propagating a religion which they knew to be false, or which, if false, though they knew it not, had nothing to offer them in this world, but the extreme of suffering? Let that person answer these questions, who doubts the truth of Christianity; but while he hesitates, the humble christian finds a ready answer in his Bible; he finds that Jesus did wonderful miracles to prove that he was the Son of God—that his apostles counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might establish this Gospel among men and that

the promises of the same word are suited to all outward estates, and inward conflicts. Blessed Bible, what a treasure! Let us prize it and study it more: it will afford us almighty weapons against all infidel opponents.

We learn here how erroneous is the common opinion, that one religion is as good as another, provided a man be *sincere* in it. "The time cometh," our Lord declares, "that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Saul of Tarsus was quite *sincere*, when he fulfilled our Lord's words in persecuting the disciples. No man ever acted with more *sincerity;* he thought he was doing God service: but did that excuse him? or was his *sincerity* a reason why he might as well remain a Jew as become a christian? Surely not. The Lord will indeed guide sincere *inquirers* into the truth, and deliver them from error in their search for the right way; but after all, we can only pronounce those to be safe, who are sincere in the *truth*—if it be true, that "*there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved,*" *but only the name of Jesus,** it is equally true that all who reject Christ must inevitably perish, let them be ever so sincere in their different forms of worship.

How often, like the apostles, are believers filled with sorrow at those events which are highly expedient and advantageous to them. *They* mourned because their master was leaving them, and yet if he had not gone, they would have been without the Comforter, whose assistance in their future work was more needful than his bodily presence could have been. It is the Christian's privilege to live by faith; to feel that Jesus has undertaken his cause for eternity, and that apparent evils shall yet turn out positive blessings. Under this assurance, he can meet the severest disappointments, and can answer his every fear and doubt by saying, "*the Lord doeth all things well.*"

Jesus now relates to his disciples the offices which the Holy Spirit should discharge when sent by him after his departure. "When he is come," "he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." † These words were primarily fulfilled at the miraculous out-pouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost;—by the mouth of Peter, the Spirit "re-

* Acts iv. 12.

† ἐλέγχω is generally rendered by our translators—*reprove*, or *rebuke*—seldom *convince*. So Stephens in his Thesaurus, gives its first meaning, 'argumentis demonstro.' By not keeping to this meaning, the passage above cited has been made very difficult, and its solemn application to the *world* has been lost sight of.

proved the world of sin," in charging the ungodly Jews with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, who was also declared to be the righteous one, or the source of righteousness to his people, by his exaltation to the Father's right hand.* Satan, the prince of the world, may be said to be "judged" by the coming of the Holy Ghost; because His presence is a pledge of the final triumph of God's cause, and the out-casting of Satan. And even now, in the proclamation of the Gospel, the Spirit *reproves* the world in relation to these great truths, even where he does not *convince* them. Every faithful sermon, therefore, is a divine reproof, whether men receive it or not. Happy they, whose hearts are touched by such a message, and become savingly convinced of these great realities.

The Spirit's work upon "the world" having been stated, Jesus next tells his disciples what the Comforter should do for *them;* that he should "guide them into all truth," and "show them things to come." These were necessary qualifications for those who were to be infallible expounders of divine truth, and who were to write the inspired Word of God. The Spirit was also to "take of the things of Christ, and show them unto them," and of this part of the Spirit's office, every sincere believer must partake. Man by nature is so blind, that he cannot see his own real state, nor can he see Christ as revealed in his holy word. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to remove this blindness, by taking the things of Christ and presenting them to him.† Thus the love, the pity, and compassion of the Saviour are made known to him, and he sees both himself and Jesus in a new point of view; himself a guilty and rebellious sinner—and Jesus an all-sufficient and a willing Saviour. Has the Holy Spirit thus revealed Christ to you? Do you wish for it? Are you praying for it? It is promised to those who ask it in prayer.‡ But let not your prayer be a cold, formal repetition of words; such a prayer never obtained any thing: strive with earnestness—pray in faith—and remember that the life of your soul depends on your receiving this inestimable gift, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

NOTE on v. 8—11.—On these verses, see an excellent note in Elsley's Annotations, who cites from Schindler, Hammond, and Whitby, &c. to establish the view given above, viz. 'that the verses refer, not so much to the process of conversion in a believer, as to the reproof administered to the world at the coming of the Holy Ghost.'

* See Acts ii. 23, 33, 36.

† 1 Cor. ii. 10—16

‡ See Luke xi. 13.

CHAP. XVI. 16—33.

CHRIST'S PROMISE OF RETURN—PERFECTION OF KNOWLEDGE HEREAFTER—PRAYER NEEDFUL IN THIS LIFE.

A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said *some* of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you. For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation? but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

When our Lord declared to his Apostles that he should depart and go to the Father, and return after a short interval, we find that they were at a loss to understand his meaning. He said, therefore, more plainly, that though distress and anguish were coming upon them, sharp as the pangs of chilhbirth, yet, as these pains are succeeded by sensations of peculiar delight, after a safe delivery, so their grief should be followed by a state of lasting joy, when he visited them again. This period of our

Lord's return, which he speaks of, could not mean the time after his resurrection, for the disciples did not then enjoy the cessation of sorrow, but rather great and multiplied trials; it must therefore mean the time of his second advent, when they, and all his believing people, shall meet Him "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." * What strong consolation does this afford to you who are believers in Jesus! Many are your afflictions at present, and many more afflictions may await you, but, in the midst of all, you have these words of your Saviour to comfort you, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." "The days of your mourning shall then be over," and God shall "wipe all tears from your eyes."

"In that day," says our Lord to the disciples, "ye shall ask me nothing." The word here translated "ask," is different from that used in the following verses: the former signifies "to ask questions for the sake of information"—the other, "to ask, as in prayer." † Our Lord, therefore, meant, that at the time of his second coming, the disciples should ask him no questions, for while they *then* only "saw through a glass, darkly," they should, at that time," see "face to face." What a glorious display will then be made to all believers! "Then shall they know even as they are known." ‡ Their knowledge of Christ —of his mysterious dealings—and of all the individuals who compose his church, shall then be perfect. Oh! you who are following the ways of this world, how can you, for a few short days of sinful indulgence, sell your immortal souls, and renounce the pleasures which Christ has in store for his believing people? *Your* pleasures are momentary—*Christ's* are eternal. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day;" § but *your* path is like the declining day, which soon shall close in utter darkness. Ere the night close upon you, and hope, for ever, be expired, hear the Saviour now saying to you, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

But although the disciples were to look forward to a time when they need not *inquire* from Jesus, yet, till then, and during the time of his absence, they were to *ask* or *pray*, in his

* Isaiah xxxv. 10.

† ἐρωτήσετε in verse 23—to *interrogate*, and αἰτήσητε, to *beseech*, in the end of the verse and in the following verses.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12. § Prov. iv. 18.

name. As yet they had asked nothing *in his name:* they had, like the Jews, applied to God as the source of mercy—with an indistinct view of the mediation of Christ, seen through types and shadows; but now that the way into the holiest was made manifest, they were to come more *distinctly* and more *boldly* in the name of Christ, to the throne of grace. All their prayers to the Father must be offered in his name, and through his intercession. What encouragements are offered to fervent, believing prayer! How inexcusable shall you be, if you are found without the blessings of the Gospel, when prayer, through Jesus, would have put you in possession of all. Can the world give you *fulness* of joy? No—but Christ can, and you are to ask it in prayer. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be *full.*"

We should frequently read over these precious words, which Jesus has bequeathed as an invaluable legacy. They will be a refreshment to us in our solitude, and a comfort under every distress. We shall have no reason to wonder if human friendship be sometimes false, for the disciples of Christ were "scattered," and "left him alone," when they were bound by every tie of gratitude to support him to the last. But as Jesus was not dependent on human assistance, neither should we; and if like him we can say, "yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me," we shall be enabled to meet the severest trials with calmness and composure.

Jesus concluded this address to his disciples, by reminding them that if they were in search of peace, he alone could bestow it: they had nothing to expect from the world but sorrow; but that as he had gained a victory over the world, he would conquer it also for them. What are your expectations of happiness? Are you seeking it in the world? Alas, you will be grievously disappointed. Jesus alone can bestow the precious treasure: nor can you ever obtain it, till you be willing to receive it at his hands. Are you struggling against the world, and its ways? "Be of good cheer," Jesus has overcome it, and his strength is offered to you if you ask it. Without this you can never prevail, but you shall be enabled to "do all things through Christ strengthening you."

CHAP. XVII. 1—12.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST AT THE LAST SUPPER—HE PLEADS FOR HIS CHURCH'S PRESERVATION—HE DISTINGUISHES IT FROM THE WORLD.

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him: And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Our blessed Lord had concluded his farewell address to his disciples, and was now on the point of departing. But that no proof might be wanting of his affection, and nothing omitted which could soothe the pangs of separation, he solemnly committed them in prayer to the care of his heavenly Father. John, who was then present, has recorded the prayer, and believers in all ages have dwelt on it with comfort. The solemnity of the time—assembled for the last time with his little band—the immediate prospect of Gethsemane and Calvary—the fulness and depth of the petitions—all endear this act of Christ's intercession to the church of God. It remains an everlasting monument of the strong and invariable attachment of Christ to his people, and may be considered as a pattern of that prevailing intercession which he carries on in heaven for all his believing followers.

We cannot attempt to enter minutely into it here, for each sentence is a subject for a sermon. We can merely glance at

the expressions of free and unmerited love, so richly displayed in this precious portion of Holy Scripture.

Jesus first prays for himself, that he might be glorified with the Father in that same glory, which they had as the persons of the blessed Trinity, "before the world was." By which prayer our Lord asserts his actual deity and pre-existence, before he took our nature and appeared in this world. He declares also that he had glorified his Father, by finishing the work committed to him, though not finished in respect of his death and resurrection, yet because these were at hand, and would be certainly accomplished, he spoke of them as already affected. And then in verse 2, he opens to us an unbounded prospect from eternity to eternity, declaring that "power had been given him over all flesh," in order that he might effect the salvation of those "whom the Father had given him." This expression imports that they were graciously selected by the eternal love of the Father,* and given to Christ as his peculiar portion. In them he delighted before time began, and therefore were they written in the "Lamb's book of life."† In this description, our Lord embraces not only the apostles, but all those who should believe on him in every age—even as the prayer comprehends the people of God from the beginning to the end of time. Eternal life must begin upon earth. It includes a saving knowledge of God the Father, in his character of unbending holiness, and at the same time, a knowledge of Jesus, through whom alone we can go to him with acceptance. There is no saving knowledge of God, but as he is revealed in Christ—out of him, he is a consuming fire; but in him, we can view all the attributes of deity in their fullest display, and all combining to promote the salvation and happiness of man. This was the *manifestation* our Lord speaks of—a light set up in the soul, which makes us acquainted with God, and prepares us for the enjoyment of his presence through all eternity. Do you know these things? Have you been taught them by the Holy Spirit—the appointed instructor in heavenly things? If not, you do not possess eternal life.

In this address of Jesus to his Father, he bore upon his heart the case of his dear disciples, whom he had gradually trained up in his service, and faithfully instructed in the divine will. But let his saints rejoice, and let sinners tremble at these momentous words, "I pray for *them*—I pray not for the *world*." By which

* Eph. i. 4, 5. † Rev. xxi. 27.

he would intimate, that though as mediator between God and man, he died for all men; yet in his office of advocate, he confined his intercession to those who were given to him by the Father; wherefore they do great injury to the faithful, who seek to erase from their minds all knowledge of their election, for this prayer is a brazen wall to the disciples, whereby they may stand stedfast, and overcome sin, death, and Satan.* The world, or the company of the ungodly, whom God foresees as unbelieving and carnal, are left to themselves; but as we cannot discern as God does, this thought ought to rouse any that have hitherto lived amongst the careless. Oh, come out from that world, which is at enmity with God. The curse of God hangs over the world, and if you remain in it, you must share its ruin. Hasten to that little Goshen, where the children of Israel have light in their dwellings.†

Jesus prays again that the Father would "keep through his own name those whom he had given him, that they might be ONE," as he and the Father were one. A union which is hidden from the eye of sense, but is as real and indissoluble as that which exists between the Father and Son. They are indeed *one* in nature and essence; and believers are only *one* with Christ by faith and spiritual life. Yet, the faithfulness of God is engaged to preserve this union unbroken. He will not leave them or forsake them, but "keep them through faith unto salvation."‡ And no safety can be more certain than that which is the fruit of the Redeemer's intercession, and the result of the Father's Almighty power. But there is a word of awful admonition in our Lord's prayer. He alludes to one who bore the name of a disciple for a long while, and was afterwards "*lost.*" You who have made a profession of religion, look close within. Your heart is treacherous: trust it not for a moment. "Be instant in prayer," and may the Lord Jesus preserve you from the shame and ruin of betraying that cause which you now profess to love and support.

* Marlorate, p. 560. † Exod. x. 23. ‡ 1 Peter i. 5.

CHAP. XVII. 13—26.

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS PEOPLE'S UNITY, HOLINESS, AND GLORY.

And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it:* that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

In reflecting on this last and solemn prayer of our Lord Jesus. there are some expressions in it which cannot but strike us, as being of peculiar importance. And first, lest any should limit the Saviour's intercession to the twelve apostles, or to the disciples then living, we have our Lord's express declaration that he intended to embrace within the benefits of it, all who, to the end of time, should believe on him through the word of his apostles. We are therefore justified in saying, that all believers may consider our Lord's words as intended to apply to them individually. You, therefore, to whom it has been given to believe, reflect upon the many privileges which this portion of divine truth states to be your's. But do not overlook the many references to holiness; which should deeply impress you with the importance of "adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things."* Jesus twice says of his believing people, "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." How

* Titus ii. 10.

forcibly does this call upon you to prove yourself Christ's, by a total separation from the sinful habits, manners, and pursuits of the world. Christ died to redeem you from the world. For your sake he "sanctified himself"—set himself apart as the great sacrifice for sin,* that you might be sanctified, and separated from the world. And will you indulge a disposition so hateful to him? The world is one of your greatest enemies; it assumes a thousand different forms, and presents itself before you in some alluring attitude at every turn you take. It is composed of *things* as well as *people*, and the things of the world will ever ensnare, even when the people of it would disgust you by their opposition. Jesus knows what trials you have to encounter, yet he does not pray that you should be taken out of the world, but that you should be kept from the evil of it. And hereby he would intimate that it glorifies the Father to be "*in* the world," but not "*of* it." Nothing but divine grace can preserve a soul in spiritual life and holy obedience: and hence, a consistent Christian is not only a proof of the efficacy of the Spirit in man's weakness, but he is a witness against the evil and corruption of those who are round about him. Let it be your daily prayer to be kept from the snares and dangers to which you are exposed.

Jesus has spoken much of the unity which his people should enjoy, not only among themselves, but with himself, and his heavenly Father. Strange and mysterious union! Strange and unaccountable love! "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us!" What an argument is this with the Christian, for a holy and consistent walk! Twice does Jesus give this reason for the union, "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." How much more evidence would Christians furnish for the truth of the gospel, if they were more united, and if they were to avoid all unnecessary divisions, and cultivate that unity of the Spirit which ought to be manifested in the bond of peace.† They should oftener reflect, that those who hope to be united for ever, should not be separated in their lifetime.

Jesus prayed for the inward sanctification of his people, and spoke of the *truth* as the appointed means. Sound doctrine is most important in this view. The Spirit will not own *error* to be the production of holiness, but makes use of his own inspired

* Maldonate says that by the unanimous consent of the Fathers, Christ' sanctifying of himself was a giving himself up as a sacrifice for sin.

† Eph. iv. 3, 4.

word as the mould to conform us to the image of Christ. Whatever efficacy truth hath in the matter of sanctification, it doth all come from God, who must be implored by prayer, to make the word successful to that end. Christ's true followers must have a real inward principle of sanctification, which not only breaks out in a few acts of righteousness, but which leads them to consecrate themselves so entirely to God, that they must not withdraw themselves to any other use.*

The concluding petition sums up all—it shows that grace ends in glory. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." This may be said to secure the everlasting glorification of all his real disciples, for Christ never pleads in vain. It also shows us in what the chief glory of the saints will consist, in being "with Christ," seeing him face to face, and enjoying the fulness of his presence, and, in a beatific vision, contemplating the glories of the Lamb—his person—his offices—his work; yea, all that belong to him. These will form an ever-satisfying subject of holy admiration. Oh! to look forward to this glory with a well-grounded hope—it will support us in every trial, and keep us looking above this passing world. But remember that the privileges stated in this chapter, belong *exclusively* to those who believe in the Lord Jesus. For such alone he prays: and while *their* salvation is ensured by his prayer, *your* perdition is as sure, while you remain at a distance from Christ, because you are not interested in it. But it is not yet too late; *to-day*, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" all shall be your's if you turn to the Saviour—pardon, peace, and eternal glory.

CHAP. XVIII. 1—27.

JUDAS BETRAYETH JESUS IN GETHSEMANE—THE MEN AND OFFICERS FALL TO THE GROUND—JESUS LED TO ANNAS, AND THEN TO CAIAPHAS.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus ofttimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band *of men* and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all

* Hutcheson.

things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am *he*. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am *he*: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him. And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and *so did* another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also *one* of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also *one* of his disciples? He denied *it*, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being *his* kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

ALL the preceding circumstances in the life of Jesus have been preparatory to that important event which we now proceed to consider. He came into the world not merely to teach, or exhibit an example of righteousness, but chiefly to suffer, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Now the sharp conflict commences, and the tremendous scene is unfolded to our view. Whilst we contemplate the Son of God bowed down under his load of trials, let us learn what our sins required, and what a debt of gratitude we owe. Oh! blessed Jesus, who didst stoop so low, and endure so much for the salvation of thy people, teach us to conceive, as we ought, of our guilt and

wretchedness, and the condescension of thy love! Impart to us the inestimable benefits which thou hast procured; "By thine agony and bloody sweat—by thy cross and passion—good Lord, deliver us."

Jesus having left the guest-chamber, departed from the city, with his eleven apostles, towards the mount of Olives, passing the brook Cedron,* which lay in his way. The garden which used to be the place of his retirement, is now visited by him for the last time. The scene of agony which occurred there is not related by St. John, as it had been fully stated by the three preceding evangelists; but he mentions some circumstances respecting the apprehension of Jesus which they had passed over. The traitor, Judas, *knew* the place of our Lord's retirement, having spent many an hour with him there, in apparent devotion; yet now he heads a band of merciless creatures, who came with proper implements to aid their works of darkness, and to take the Saviour by force. Ignorant wretches! You little knew who you came to apprehend! You might have saved yourselves all this useless trouble! Jesus is a willing victim; else, with all your swords and staves, backed by the hosts of hell, you could never have made him prisoner. Behold the dignity and fortitude with which Jesus advances to meet them, and with a single sentence, strikes them to the ground, and Judas among the number. After this display of what he *could do*, we find him asking them, "whom seek ye?" and when they said Jesus of Nazareth, he not only acknowledges the opprobrious name, but demands that all their vengeance should fall on him, and that those (his beloved disciples) should be allowed to go safe and free. Peter, with more zeal than prudence, draws his sword and uses it, but is reproved by Jesus, who would not allow his cause to be supported by carnal weapons.

Jesus is now bound, and taken to the house of Annas—the first stage of his last indignity—the first step towards the mock tribunal. Annas was not the High Priest for that year, having been dismissed after holding the office for fifteen years, but being father-in-law to Caiaphas,† the High Priest, and having had five sons who had filled that office, he had great authority with the Jews, and therefore Christ was sent first to him for examination. John follows him thither, and by his interest, gains

* Cedron signifies *blackness*, perhaps so called from the gloomy valley through which it ran. It seems to have ran between the garden and the town—for Jesus went to Gethsemane—beyond (περαν) this brook.

† See Josephus, Antiq. l. xviii. c. 3.

admission for Peter, who now gives the first token of his abated zeal, and of that melancholy fall which stands upon record as a monument of human frailty. Though John does not repeat the fact, yet *all* the disciples had forsaken Jesus before this. May God, of his mercy, keep us from falling; or else "every fiery trial," which we may meet with, will prove our weakness in an equally awful manner. From the house of Annas, Jesus was taken to the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest, where, though in the dead of night, the principal members of the council were assembled to receive their prisoner.* Here he underwent an examination respecting his followers and his doctrine; but his mild appeal to his public conduct only exasperated his enemies, one of whom struck him, uncondemned, even in the presence of his judges; who, upon this occasion, forgot that justice which is an essential requisite for such an office.

How loudly do many exclaim against these Jews for their iniquitous conduct towards the Lord Jesus! How many are touched with pity for the innocent victim of malice! Perhaps these may be your feelings. Ah! turn your eyes within, and examine whether the conduct of these Jews may not be a picture of what your own have been, whatever they may now be. Jesus and his true followers are opposed and persecuted by the world. They are mocked and ridiculed—their motives are suspected, and their actions misrepresented. They are, confessedly, moral characters, and no occasion can be found against them, "except concerning the law of their God." † Do you turn away from those whom your conscience tells you are sincere in their devotedness to the Saviour? Is your opposition excited, because their lives form a contrast to your's, and condemn your neglect of religion? Then you are persecuting Jesus, for he says, concerning his people, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." ‡ Or are you like Judas, a professed follower of the Lord Jesus, and yet betraying your Master's cause into the hands of Satan, by hypocrisy and deceit? Surely you will be dealt with as that traitor was, if you continue to say, "Hail, master!" and yet cherish sin in your heart, and prefer it to the service of Christ. Beware, lest you be found fighting against God. You must stand at his bar, and answer for your contempt of his Gospel; your opposition to the voice of conscience; and your evil speeches against his people. Oh! turn to him now,

* See Matt. xxvi. 57. † Dan. vi. 5. ‡ Zech. ii. 8.

while he waits to be gracious, that you may have confidence and joy before him, at the great day of his appearing!

NOTE on v. 6.—"Without a blow, one word struck, drove back, and prostrated a crowd fierce with hatred and terrible with arms. For God was hid in the flesh, and the eternal day was so obscured by His human body, that he was sought for with lanterns and torches to be slain in the darkness. What shall we do when He cometh to judge? He did this when he was going to be judged."—*Augustine.*

CHAP. XVIII. 28—40.

JESUS ARRAIGNED BEFORE PILATE—THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE JEWS—PILATE'S CONDUCT AND QUESTIONS—THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault *at all.* But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

JESUS, we have seen, was already tried and condemned by the High Priest, and the grand council of the Jews. We might have expected, therefore, that they would proceed to stone him, according to their law, and as they had frequently before attempted to do in the violence of their rage. But, mark the overruling providence of God! "The Scriptures must be fulfilled;" and Jesus must be taken before Pilate, the Roman governor, to be

condemned by the gentiles to their mode of executing malefactors.* What folly, what madness is it to neglect the study of that book, every word of which shall receive the most exact accomplishment! The threatenings against sinners are as sure as the promises to the saints.

Observe now, the impious hypocrisy of these Jews; they hesitate not to murder an innocent person, and yet, under pretence of religious scruples, refuse to enter the gentile judgment-hall or prætorium, which was formerly Herod's palace, but was now allotted to the Roman governor, where also he heard public trials. Into this the Jews would not enter, as belonging to the Gentiles or Romans, because it was the time of the Passover. At the moment they were plotting to shed innocent blood, they were unwilling to omit an outward form of devotion: "they strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel." To what purpose are men exact in outward observances, while the vilest sins reign in their hearts? Is the Lord God, who knows the secret of all hearts, to be thus imposed on by an empty show? In vain is all our outward appearance of devotion, while the heart is unrenewed by the Holy Spirit.

Well would it have been for Pilate, had he continued to act in this trial, as he began. His conscience evidently acquitted Jesus, for when unbiassed by the fear of man, or love of popularity, he declared that he "found no fault in him *at all*." Rather than Christ shall want witnesses, the mouth of Pilate is opened to pronounce him innocent. But what a difference is there between a man when he acts by himself, and when he becomes the servant of another's will. It is Pilate's tongue that says, "I find in him no fault at all:" it is the Jew's tongue in Pilate's mouth, which says, "let him be crucified." Truly does the word of God say, "the fear of man bringeth a snare."† The world is a hard task-master, and we shall never know what freedom is, till we are enabled to renounce all friendship with it, and viewing it as an enemy, fight against it in the strength of God.

The first charge upon which the Jews condemned Jesus, was for making himself the Son of God; but as Pilate did not regard any questions relating to religion, or the Jewish law, they altered their charge, and accused him of setting himself up as a king against Cæsar. Upon this charge Pilate questioned him, and though Jesus never denied that he was a king, yet he so ex-

* See Matt. xx. 19. † Prov. xxix. 25.

plained the nature of his kingdom, to be spiritual and not temporal, that Pilate was still unable to convict him. Observe the emphatic expression of Jesus, "NOW is my kingdom not from hence." He does not say that he should never have a kingdom on earth, but that it was not to be set up at that time, which was the period of his suffering; nor was it to be such a kingdom as they expected, guided, like others, by mere worldly policy. The kingdom of Jesus shall be established at his second coming, when he shall "take to him his great power and reign," and when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ."* Are you prepared to meet the Saviour? Does he now reign in your heart? If not, you never can reign in his kingdom: which, we have every reason to believe, is close at hand. Oh! listen to the warning voice, "Behold, I come as a thief." "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." Examine your lamps whether they are ready—furnished with oil—or whether you only hold in your hand the lamp of an empty profession.

When our Lord had informed Pilate what kind of a kingdom he claimed, and that he "came to bear witness of the truth," Pilate immediately asked, "What is truth?" This was the most important of all inquiries, and he had one before him capable of giving him instruction respecting it! But, alas! he waited not for an answer. "When he had said this, he went out again."

> What is truth? 'twas Pilate's question put
> To truth itself, that deign'd him no reply,
> And wherefore? Will not God impart his light
> To them that ask it?—Freely; 'tis his joy,
> His glory and his nature to impart;
> But to the proud, uncandid, insincere,
> Or negligent enquirer, not a spark.†

Are there none to be found who resemble Pilate? Are there none who inquire about religion, with as much levity as if it were quite a matter of indifference? Are there none who inquire, merely for the sake of curiosity, and others for the sake of argument, or objection? Is this the case with you? Examine well your motives, for only that inquiry will be successful, which comes from a heart desirous of knowing what the word of God declares to be "truth." You must "search for wisdom, and dig for her as for hid treasures," and "then shall you know, when you *follow on* to know the Lord." You are diligent in your inquiries after anything which may better your

* Rev. xi. 15. † Cowper.

condition in life; and you should, surely, be no less diligent in your inquiries after that which can give life to your immortal soul.

Everything in the world has a peculiar attachment to that which most resembles itself, so that the Jews could give no stronger proof of their being themselves murderers, than by preferring a murderer to the Lord Jesus. You prefer Barabbas to Jesus, when your love of sin leads you to indulge in what Jesus abhors.

NOTE v. 28.—What is called here "the Judgment-hall" is strictly the prætorium or general's tent—πραιτώριον—the prætorian residence—here, it was Herod's palace, where, the Roman Governor (usually living at Cæsarea) resided, when he visited Jerusalem. The βῆμα or tribunal (v. 13,) was the real Judgment-seat. St. John only relates the conversation between Jesus and Pilate *inside* the prætorium—into which the Jews would not enter. All the evangelists give the public trial and condemnation which took place on the Gabbatha or pavement, outside the prætorium.

CHAP. XIX. 1—22.

CHRIST IS SCOURGED, AND CROWNED WITH THORNS—PILATE DELIVERS HIM TO BE CRUCIFIED—HIS TITLE AND INSCRIPTION.

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged *him.* And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put *it* on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And *Pilate* saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify *him,* crucify *him.* Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify *him:* for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment-hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with *him,* away with *him,* crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered,

We have no king but Cæsar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led *him* away. And he, bearing his cross, went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, *and* Greek, *and* Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

THE case of Pilate affords a striking example of that struggle which often takes place in worldly persons, between the voice of conscience and the fear of man; and we may learn, too, from his case, that conscience, unassisted by the special grace of God, can never resist the adverse forces which it has to encounter. Pilate was persuaded in his mind that Jesus was innocent, and therefore could not endure the thought of putting him to death. He strove, by every means in his power, to pacify those who were his enemies: several times he bore testimony to his innocence, and even inflicted upon him the punishment of scourging, under the idea that his enemies would be satisfied. Now he tried another plan, in hopes that he might yet prevail upon them to spare him. He brought forth Jesus,* arrayed as he had been by the soldiers, in mock majesty, and said unto the people—"Behold the man!" hoping, as it would seem, to move their pity by a sight of the meek and gentle sufferer, and by showing how little Cæsar had to fear from so insignificant a rival. But the chief priests and officers, who before had only instigated the people, now came forward, and, hardened against all feelings of pity or compassion, desired at once that he should be crucified. You who are a believer in Jesus, meditate upon the scene here presented to you; "Behold the man"—the God-man—Jesus. Behold him, disguised in purple robes—his temples wounded with a thorny crown—his face spit upon—his cheeks buffeted—his head smitten—his hand sceptered with a reed—and himself derided with scoffing acclamations! Picture this scene to your

* Pilate came forth *four* times from the prætorium, into which the Jews would not enter—to speak to them—assembled as they were on the *pavement*. This place which was round the Governor's tent or house, was called in Hebrew Gabbatha—from a word signifying, *a high place*—but in Greek it was called λιθόστρωτος—*stone-paved*,—a tessellated pavement of Mosaic work, very common in Rome, and adopted by Roman governors in the provinces. Here Jesus was set before the Jews with the crown of thorns, and here he was finally condemned. See Wetstein.

self, and then say, "these are the fruits of his love to *me!*" "these things he endured to rescue me from everlasting misery!" Then ask what return he merits at your hands. Surely the return of unbounded gratitude, and of never-ceasing zeal in his service. You who scoff at religion, or you who are so occupied with the business or pleasures of the world, as to have no concern about Christ and religion, "Behold the man!" You see him here presented before you with all the marks of external weakness. But *soon* shall you see him in a far different character. That weakness and meanness were submitted to, in order to effect an atonement for sinners; but if you neglect that atonement, and choose the world in preference, you shall feel the weight of his avenging arm, when he comes to destroy those who would not have him to reign over them. Behold him now as a Saviour, and when he comes as a Judge, you shall behold him without fear.

The love of popularity, and the fear of man, are generally united, and these, at last, prevailed over Pilate's conscience, and he consented that Jesus should be crucified. Oh! wretched Pilate! After all his convictions, he did not obey the voice of conscience. Man's strength, when opposed by temptation, is no more able to restrain his inclination, than the green twigs could resist the strength of Samson.* If Adam, when in innocence, could not withstand Satan, surely fallen man cannot hope to prevail by his own natural strength. The grace of God can alone enable you to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and that grace is freely offered to all who ask it sincerely, through Christ.

Nothing was left undone which could add to the sufferings of our blessed Lord. From the tribunal at which he was condemned, he was hurried away to execution, and crucified between two notorious malefactors, as being the vilest of the human race. This, however, only served to fulfil the Scripture, which had said, "He was numbered with the transgressors."† On such occasions it was usual to place over the head of the criminal an inscription, by which all the spectators might know both his name, and the crime for which he suffered. Pilate took upon him to prepare the inscription; and as Caiaphas before had unconsciously been made to utter a prophecy, so Pilate is made to write one; and though weak and unstable in the great matter of Christ's death, yet he was enabled to be firm about an *apparent* trifle—the al-

* See Judges xvi. 6—9. † Isaiah liii. 12.

teration of the words of the inscription, which the Jews urged him to make, but he refused, saying, "What I have written, I have written." His firmness now was the more remarkable, when we consider his weakness before. But it was no trifle about which he contended, for without doubt he acted by the overruling providence of God, and gave to Jesus his true title—"THE KING OF THE JEWS;"—writing it in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—the three languages most known in the world at that time. But when was Jesus the king of the Jews? At his first coming, He was appointed King but not acknowledged or received as such. The Jewish people cast him out and crucified him as a malefactor, instead of submitting to him as a king; and to this day, as a nation, they hate the name of the blessed Messiah, and as a consequence of their sin, they are dispersed through the nations of the earth. But a time is fast approaching when the words of the prophets touching their restoration and conversion shall be fulfilled.* And then also, the promise to Mary shall be accomplished—that *the child of her womb* should sit upon the throne of David, and reign over the house of Jacob.† He will soon come to reign; but that you may reign with him, he must now reign in your heart. Let it then be your chief desire to love Christ, and to wait for him, and the day of the Lord will not take you by surprise, but you shall have a blessed interest in all its glories—"as heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

NOTE.—St. Mark says that it was ὥρα τρίτη—"the third hour," when our Lord was crucified. St. John says here, verse 14—ὡσεὶ ἕκτη, "about the *sixth*." Many critics suppose that the word τρίτη ought to be read here, according to some manuscripts. A more satisfactory explanation is given by Dr. Hammond. The Jews divided both day and night into four parts. The first three hours—i. e. from six to nine, was called the *third;* the next three, the *sixth*, and so on the *ninth* and *twelfth*. St. Mark is definite, the third hour, or our nine was passed (ch. xv. 25.) St. John is not definite—*about* the *sixth*—shewed that the sixth, or our noon, was not come, and therefore might include any time between the *third* and *sixth*. It is very clear that our Lord was six hours, or nearly so, on the ignominious cross. See Mark xv. 25, 33, 34.

* See Ezek. xxxvii. 21, 25. Hosea iii. 4, 5. Zech. xiv. 9, 16.
† Luke i. 32, 33.

CHAP. XIX. 23—42.

CHRIST COMMENDS MARY TO JOHN—HIS LAST WORDS—PROPHECIES FULFILLED AT HIS DEATH.

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also *his* coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath-day, (for that sabbath-day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw *it* bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave *him* leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound *weight*. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation *day:* for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

It is truly wonderful to observe how the fulfilment of prophecy respecting the Lord Jesus was brought about by those who only seemed to follow the bent of their own inclinations. Judas was actuated by covetousness; the priests by envy; Pilate by fear;

and the soldiers who cast lots for one garment, while they divided the other into four parts, acted from a regard to their personal interests. But God made use of their respective weaknesses to accomplish his own designs. How little did these soldiers think of being witnesses to the truth of prophecy, and, therefore, to the veracity of Christ's mission.* Every thing, however apparently trivial, is ordered by God, and made a necessary link in the chain of his eternal counsel. What an argument is this for your seeking the continual guidance and protection of the Lord!

In the hour of our Lord's crucifixion, when nearly all the disciples had forsaken him, his female relatives remained with him, and, together with John, the beloved disciple, preferred the pain and danger of a continued attendance on him, to the repose and safety of a disgraceful flight. To this kindness of their's, the dying Jesus was not insensible. On the contrary, he took that opportunity of securing for his mother a protector during the remainder of her days, and conferred an honour upon John, by consigning her to his care. Whatever Jesus did *as God*, was peculiar to himself; but whatever he did *as man*, was intended for imitation, for "he left us an example that we should follow his steps." † Here, then, we learn a lesson of filial piety, and of Christian love; and the mourning child of God may also receive comfort by reflecting, that however long his Saviour delays assistance, yet it is sure in the end. Jesus might have arranged matters for his mother long before, but he would not, because he knew what would be the fittest season.‡

When Jesus had fulfilled the last prophecy respecting him, previous to his death, by saying, "I thirst," which induced the people to offer him vinegar to drink,§ he then pronounced that memorable expression, "IT IS FINISHED." Our blessed Lord not having stated what he alluded to as finished, we are left to collect his meaning from a general view of that work which he came to accomplish. We may, therefore, understand him to mean that he had completed the fulfilment of those prophecies that related to his first coming; and that he had finished the work of redemption and atonement for guilty man. The work he came to do for our salvation was not accomplished until he rose from the dead; for his resurrection is as important as his

* See Psalm xxii. 18. † 1 Peter ii. 21.

‡ The whole passage proves that our Lord did not regard the Virgin Mary as a being raised out of the lot of Adam's family, but like all unprotected females, requiring special sympathy and help.

§ See Psalm xxii. 15, and lxix. 21.

death: but the propitiation by bloodshedding was *finished* when he bowed the head and gave up the ghost—not a sin unatoned for; he made "a *full*, *perfect*, and *sufficient* satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." What a sure ground of hope is here for all who feel their need of mercy. Are you a person mourning under your sins, and fearful that they are too great to be pardoned? You have an atonement made for them, such as perfectly satisfies the justice of God, and discharges the utmost farthing of your debt. The Gospel tells you "*It is finished.*" You may bring the greatest amount of guilt to this blood of atonement, and, behold, it will cleanse you from all sin. The heaviest burden may be rolled at the foot of the cross, and pardon and peace will follow. God's justice is satisfied, because the price of redemption is paid, and the great work of propitiation *finished*. Blessed be God for this truth—may we experience all the enjoyment of it in our own consciences, and exhibit all its constraining influence in our daily walk.

The depravity of man's heart is beyond the terms of expression. Who that had not seen it recorded in the Holy Scriptures, could conceive it possible that those who felt no remorse in crucifying the Lord Jesus, should yet pretend to feel such reverence for the Sabbath as not to endure the thought of its being profaned by his body remaining on the cross on that day, even though it were "an high-day," being the first day of unleavened bread.* This is another instance in which God overruled the wickedness of the Jews to accomplish his own purposes; for, from their pretended sanctity, arose their singular treatment of our Lord's body. The Romans were accustomed to leave upon the cross those who were thus put to death, in order that they might be devoured by birds of prey. But the Jews, who on some occasions put persons to death by hanging, were forbidden to keep them on the tree all night; † and it was through fear of profaning their Sabbath by a breach of this command, that they begged of Pilate to adopt the Jewish instead of the Roman plan, and to dispatch the sufferers at once by breaking their legs, that they might then be taken down from the cross. An order to this effect issued from Pilate, and the soldiers received commands to execute it. But was it not foretold respecting Jesus, the antitype of the Paschal Lamb, that "a bone of him should not be broken?" ‡ Do the soldiers know anything of this? who is to stop them? who will give them private

* See Lev. xxiii. 5, 7. † See Deut. xxi. 22, 23. ‡ Exod. xii. 46.

information? no one! the power of God restrains them. They broke the legs of the two thieves, but they were restrained from doing the same to Jesus, by finding "that he was dead already." Had they struck the blow, there had been an end of the truth of God's word. But why does one of the soldiers take upon him to offer an indignity to the lifeless body of Jesus, without any order from his superiors? Why did he pierce him with a spear? There was another prophecy to be fulfilled, which had said, that they "should look on him whom they had pierced:" * therefore God put it into the hearts of enemies to do to *him* what they did not *to the others*, and to refrain from doing to *him*, what they did *to the others*. If this had not been done, our Lord's claim to the Messiahship had failed. Oh! the omnipotence of God! Does it startle you to think that you are to fall into the hands of a God of such Almighty power, who can turn the hearts of men to act as he pleases? Rather take comfort, that since Jesus has died, you may draw near to him with acceptance, and implore of him to change and sanctify your heart by the renewing influence of his Holy Spirit.

We are also told, that when the side of Jesus was pierced, there issued a stream of "blood and water." A deep mystery is here contained. Believers are said to be justified by the blood of Jesus,† and to be sanctified by his Spirit,‡ which, in its cleansing properties, is represented by water. This surprising appearance, therefore, was intended to show that both these blessings flow equally from the pierced side of Jesus. They flow together, to show that we are not to expect one without the other. Justification and holiness, though united, are distinct, even as water and blood are distinct. But we must take care not to mix the two: it is the blood that justifies, and the washing of the Spirit that sanctifies. St. John elsewhere shows that this is no fanciful interpretation: "this is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood!" § Behold the rock which was smitten, and the waters of life gushed forth! Behold "the fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness," a fountain not of water only, but of blood too! The two sacraments which Jesus instituted while alive, flow from him when dead, as the last memorials of love to his Church—the water of Baptism, and the sacramental "blood of the New Testament shed for the remission of sins;" both being represented by the united stream that flowed from

* Zech. xii. 10.
† Rom. v. 9.
‡ Rom. viii. 9, 13.
§ 1 John v. 6.

the wounded side, and both intended for the comfort and edification of the Church. Oh, precious and sovereign wound, by which our souls may be healed! Into the cleft of this rock let us fly, and hide ourselves, from the terror of avenging justice. "The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin:" the Holy Spirit can renew the most unholy: both are offered freely to all who ask them.

The last circumstance we have to notice here, is the burial of our blessed Lord. He had been "numbered with transgressors," which made it unlikely that the prophecy of his having his grave with the rich, should be accomplished.* But the Lord never wants instruments to effect his purposes. Joseph of Arimathea, who is particularly said to have been "a *rich* man," was inspired with zeal to beg the body from Pilate, which was granted to him. In the embalming of the body, he is assisted by Nicodemus, the same who three years before came to Jesus secretly; but now, no longer willing to be a night-bird, he boldly flies forth, and looks upon the face of the sun. If you once were fearful like him, copy his example now, and hesitate not to manifest your attachment to Jesus, even though all your friends and relatives be ready to oppose you. The body of Jesus lies, for the present, in the tomb of Joseph. Let us "go and weep there," till we hear of his resurrection. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

NOTE on v. 34.—Bishop Hall well remarks, "I could rave at that rude hand—but O God, when I look up to thee, and consider how thy holy and wise providence so overrules the most barbarous actions of men, that, besides their will, they turn beneficial, I can at once hate them and bless thee. This very wound hath a mouth to speak the Messiahship of my Saviour, and the truth of thy Scripture."

CHAP. XX. 1—18.

MARY MAGDALENE EARLY AT THE SEPULCHRE—PETER AND JOHN GO THERE —JESUS ADDRESSES MARY.

The first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did out-run Peter, and

* Isaiah liii. 9.

came first to the sepulchre. And he, stooping down, *and looking in*, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie; And the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes; but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and *to* my God and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things unto her.

As the other evangelists had so fully stated the circumstances which attended our Lord's rising from the dead, St. John passes them over altogether, and only relates what occurred after that event had taken place. By consulting the different passages of Scripture which treat upon this subject, it appears that several women, who were present while our Lord was entombed, agreed among themselves to meet at the sepulchre on the morning after the Sabbath, for the purpose of embalming the body. They seemed to have proceeded in two different parties to the tomb—in the first of which was Mary Magdalene, who, on seeing the stone removed from the mouth of the tomb (probably before she came up to the spot) was sent back to inform the disciples; when, therefore, we find her at the tomb, with Peter and John, we must regard it as her *second* visit that morning. How zealous is love;—early in the morning while it was yet dark, Mary hastens to her Lord's tomb, returns with the news that the stone is removed, and hastens back with the two disciples, again to inquire and again to wait the issue.* But we need not be surprised. Mary had received much, therefore she loved much.† The grateful love which the Christian bears towards his Saviour, overcomes

* See Greswell's lucid Harmony and admirable Dissertations on the resurrection. vol. iii.

† See Luke viii. 2.

difficulties which other persons think insurmountable. It gives energy to the indolent—courage to the timid—and liberality to the miser. There is no principle so powerful. Do not take any one's word for this assertion, but pray that you may know it from your own experience.

As soon as Mary had informed Peter and John, they quickly set out to examine for themselves. The difference of natural character in these two apostles is remarkable. John, being the younger, "did outrun Peter," and having arrived at the place, *looked* into the sepulchre, "*yet went he not in.*" Peter, being the more intrepid character, "*went into the sepulchre*" as soon as he arrived, and saw the careful manner in which the linen clothes were folded up, and laid in separate places, evidently showing that the body had not been taken away, but had taken its departure with the utmost calmness and composure. John then went in, "and saw and *believed*" that Jesus had risen, whilst Peter only "*wondered* in himself at that which was come to pass,"* having still, it appears, doubts respecting them. John's character was stamped with gentleness and love—Peter's with courage and zeal, but both were useful in their different spheres of duty.

Although Peter and John soon retired from the sepulchre, yet Mary remained behind, weeping; and her constancy was repaid by pleasure, the most unexpected. She was not satisfied with what Peter and John had said, though they had both gone into the tomb, but after all, "she stooped down and looked into it." She was now favoured with a sight, which was denied to them. She saw two angels, who inquired into the cause of her grief, and while in the act of bewailing to them the loss of her absent Lord, she was addressed by a person from behind her, whom she supposed to be the gardener, and who put to her those touching questions—"Woman, whom seekest thou? Why weepest thou?" It is well for us, if, like her, we can reply, that "we seek him whom our souls love" above all things below; and that our greatest sorrow is, when we lose the sense of God's love and presence. This unknown person was none other than her risen Lord, who was pleased to make his *first* manifestation, after his resurrection, to her—a gracious reward of her diligence and love—for, though dead, she still loved him: she seems also to have had some vague hopes that the grave had not swallowed up the portion of her soul, though she could scarcely dare to expect

* Luke xxiv. 12.

that her name would be sounded again by that tongue, which she had seen laid silent in the grave. Many a tender and humble soul afflicts itself with a longing for that Saviour, who is close at hand; yet, through want of faith, it perceives him not. Jesus is nigh to every one of us, but our eyes are holden, like Mary's till the Spirit of God removes the scales, and reveals him whom the natural heart can never perceive.

Jesus spoke first, but Mary knew him not till he called her *by name.* Jesus speaks to all in his word, but they only can know him, who are individually called by his grace. The Holy Spirit, which conveys that call, is freely offered to every one who asks it.

It is probable that Mary, now discovering that it was the Lord, wished to cling to him as one that had found a lost friend, and perhaps fondly hoped that she should not again lose his bodily presence, and therefore Jesus commanded her—"Touch me not,* for I am not yet ascended to my Father;" she was perhaps ignorant of the necessity there was for his ascension, though now convinced of his resurrection. And in this ignorance, she might have expected to have enjoyed the same personal, *continued* intercourse, as before. But when Jesus said, "I am not yet ascended," he implied, that he hastened towards his ascension, and that therefore it was not right to regard him with the same views that she had hitherto done, before he had walked the path of sorrow; now he was about to remove from it, and ascend to the highest heavens.† And as it was meet that the disciples should be informed of his resurrection—leading as it did to his triumphant exaltation—he does not wish Mary to remain with him at that moment, but rather convey to his sorrowing disciples, the glad news of his resurrection. But mark the Saviour's expression—"Go to my brethren." Whom does he call *brethren*? those who very lately "forsook him and fled," and one of whom had shamefully denied him! Yea, more, he speaks of ascending to "his Father, and *their* Father—his God, and *their* God;" Those "whom Jesus loves, he loves unto the end."‡ If they fall into sin, they shall surely feel the weight of God's displeasure, yet it is the displeasure of a *Father*, who withdraws his comforts, so that they shall have no peace till they return into the narrow path. It is not the punishment of

* μή με ἅπτου—"touch me not," may mean—"*embrace* me not"—do not detain me; the verb απτομαι has a very extensive meaning. See 2 Cor. vi. 17. 1 John v. 18.

† Chrysostom, Hom. lxxxvi. in Joannem.

‡ See chap. xiii. 1.

one who intends to cast off, but of one who chastens, to restore; though the infirmities of God's reconciled children shall not displace them from their adoption, yet, as a safeguard against the indulgence of sin, they shall never transgress without a salutary correction.* How animating then is it to dwell on Christ's intercession for his people. He pleads for them as brethren—himself the elder brother—bearing before the throne all the wants, trials, and temptations of the whole family. And who, then, can really hurt the saints of God? None can condemn them, and nothing "shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

CHAP. XX. 19—31.

CHRIST APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK—THE INCREDULITY OF THOMAS—THE SCRIPTURES A SUFFICIENT RULE OF FAITH.

Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you: And when he had so said, he shewed unto them *his* hands, and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whosesoever *sins* ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. *Then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.

WITH what joy must the disciples have welcomed the news of their Master's resurrection! They had been scattered through fright, when Jesus was taken prisoner; and though they had

* See Psalm lxxxix. 30—36.

now assembled with mutual consent, yet their fears had not forsaken them, as the bolts upon their door sufficiently prove. It is distinctly stated that the evening of the day on which they came together, was "the same day" on which Jesus rose from the dead—"the first day of the week"—our Sunday. It was on this same day, that they assembled again, when Thomas was present,* and that day has ever since been observed as the Christian Sabbath, in remembrance of our Lord's resurrection,† an event which sufficiently warrants the change from the last day of the week to the first—sanctioned as it was by our Lord's gracious presence, and confirmed by apostolic precedent. While they were thus assembled, their beloved Lord appeared amongst them. We need not to imagine that Jesus penetrated the door or walls in any supernatural manner, but that his almighty power prevailed to open the door, so as to afford him an easy and unperceived entrance.

After the usual greeting, he shewed them his hands and his feet, stamped with the impression of his late sufferings. He then breathed upon them as man, but gave them his Spirit as God, and thus sent them forth on the grand errand of the Gospel, as his ambassadors, proclaiming peace and reconciliation to guilty man, and thus, instrumentally, remitting sins. The Lord was about to give the Holy Spirit to men, and because he would have us know that sins were remitted by the Holy Spirit, which he gives to the faithful, and not for the merits of men, he says first —"Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and then adds, "whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted"—that is to say, it is the Spirit who remits, and not you.‡ He also empowered them to write those records of divine truth, which should contain the rules and evidences, whereby all men, to the end of time, might know whether they stood condemned or acquitted in the sight of God. Blessed be God, those records have been preserved, and we, in this favoured country, have the means of possessing the sacred volume. May we receive the message of the Gospel, and thus know that our sins are remitted by the God of all grace.

But where was Thomas when the rest of the brethren were assembled together? Had his fears put him to so long a flight, that he had not yet returned? Or was he absent upon some

* See v. 26. † Rev. i. 10.

‡ Augustine, Sermon 99, vol. v.—In this view Chrysostom, Ambrose, and the Fathers generally agree—holding that ministers can only remit *ministerially*, as God's ambassadors: and not *judicially*, as the Church of Rome pretends; making the *validity* of the absolution depend on the *intention* of the priest.

trifling occasion? Be this as it may, he lost, for a time, that divine breathing, which the rest so comfortably enjoyed, and he fell into that weak distrust, which his presence would have prevented. He refused to credit the report of ten witnesses, besides that of the women, who had seen their risen Lord, and declared that he would never yield assent, till he had the full evidence of his senses. Thomas was yet ignorant that "faith cometh by hearing," and that the testimony of those inspired witnesses, confirmed afterwards by miracles, was that which was to win the assent of future ages to the fact of Christ's resurrection. All this unbelief came upon Thomas, as the fruits of his absence from that evening's meeting. We cannot but be losers by our absence from the house of God. It is there that the Lord repeatedly breathes forth his Holy Spirit; and those who wish to partake of it, should come within the reach of its every operation. Many a frivolous reason serves as an excuse for persons to absent themselves from the house of prayer—some slight indisposition, or a shower of rain; whereas, neither more serious illness, nor more unpleasant weather, would prevent the same persons from attending a place of public amusement, where they had been expected or invited to attend. Why is this? Because their hearts are in the one place, and not in the other. They go to the one, because they love it—they are absent from the other, because they have no pleasure in it. Oh! what confusion shall cover such faces, when the Lord shall disclose the secrets of all hearts!

Yet we are indebted to the incredulity of Thomas, for obtaining more evidence of the resurrection than we should otherwise have had. On the following Sabbath, the disciples assembled again, and Thomas along with them; and now he was favoured with more than he deserved, namely, that ocular and sensible proof of Christ's resurrection, which he demanded; for Jesus appeared again, and offered him his hands and side to see and feel; upon which his doubts vanished."* He now exclaimed, in holy wonder, and in a direct act of worship, "my Lord, and my God," which was the more remarkable, because he saw rather the proofs of Christ's manhood in his hands and feet. He now believed fully his real resurrection, and by this he was "declared to be the Son of God with power."† Surely we are in-

* Our Lord retained the mark of the wounds in his side, and the print of the nails in his hands and feet. Have we not reason to believe that he ascended with these marks and will retain them at his second coming? See Zech. xii. 10.

† Rom. i. 4.

excusable if we doubt—such witnesses as these to Christ's resurrection were not *deceivers*, and could not be *deceived*.

"Many other signs did Jesus" in proof of his resurrection, and many other things, doubtless, he both did and said, "which are not written in this book." The Church of Rome brings this as an argument for *unwritten traditions*—that as all is not written, the rest must be transmitted by word of mouth. We may well ask her to produce these traditions, and we find that she utterly fails, or she brings forward things contradictory to the inspired Scriptures. The truth is, St. John's words prove the sufficiency of the Bible, as a rule of faith; enough having been written to show us the way of life. He says, "these are *written* that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name."

Let the timid believer feel great encouragement from the resurrection of Jesus. Is it sin that threatens you? Behold! the resurrection of your Redeemer publishes your discharge! Your surety was arrested, and cast into the prison of his grave, nor could he have come forth, if the uttermost farthing of your debt had not been discharged. He *is* come forth—the debt is paid, and can you fear? Is it the wrath of God? Wherefore is that but for sin? If your sin be blotted out, the quarrel is at an end, and if your Saviour has suffered for you, you need not fear suffering yourself. Infinite justice would scorn a second payment, even if you could offer it. Is it death that startles you? Why need you fear a conquered enemy? What harm is there in a serpent, but for its sting? "The sting of death is sin;" *that* has been pulled out by your Redeemer, so that the monster death can do you no harm. Oh! bless Jesus for his death, and still more for his resurrection; and since he has "raised you up to newness of life," seek those "things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."

NOTE 1, v. 23.—We can best explain "this power of the keys," or ministerial forgiveness, by the office of an ambassador. A distant province has rebelled against the king, the people at length submit. An Ambassador is sent to *declare* the king's pardon, that is, that all bans and penalties are removed, and the people restored to royal favour. In the name of the king, he says, "I forgive all past rebellion." So the Apostles of Christ and afterwards, truly ordained ministers, are his ambassadors, they forgive in Christ's name—*declaring* that God's pardon is given to the penitent, and *remitting* all bans and excommunication that might shut out of the Gospel kingdom.

NOTE 2, v. 25.—Thus God over-ruled the unbelief of the disciples to the greater confirmation of the truth—which made Gregory say—"The doubtfulness of Thomas has profited me more than the faith of Mary."

CHAP. XXI.

CHRIST APPEARS AGAIN TO HIS DISCIPLES—THE GREAT DRAUGHT OF FISHES—PETER COMMANDED TO FEED CHRIST'S SHEEP—THE CONCLUSION.

After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias: and on this wise shewed he *himself*. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt *his* fisher's coat *unto him*, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship, (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come *and* dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? and he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do?* Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall

not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

St. John seemed to have concluded his history with the foregoing chapter, but new matters occurring, he proceeded to enlarge upon what he had just delivered. He had said, that there were "many other signs which Jesus did," in proof of his resurrection; and in this chapter, he mentions one, which was Christ's third appearance to some of his disciples at the sea of Tiberias. They had gone a fishing, and had spent a night of fruitless toil, after which Jesus presented himself on the shore, and by his omnipotence, procured for them a miraculous draught of fishes, by directing them to cast the net on that side where his omniscience told him they were to be found.

The distinguishing characters of Peter and John are here, again, observable. John first discovered that it was Jesus, but Peter, with his usual boldness, leaped into the sea as soon as he heard that it was the Lord, being impatient of any delay which should keep him from his Saviour. Oh! that there were such a mind in all of us—ready to leave our worldly calling, when an opportunity occurred of hasting to the presence of our Lord! The disciples now had positive proof that it was Jesus himself, by his eating in their presence of that food which he had previously provided. "As soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." All this he graciously provided for them, and partook of himself, to prove the reality of his resurrection. His careful concern for their temporal wants, is also remarkable, for by this extraordinary draught of fishes, they were furnished with the means of their support; and this was needed, as they were directed to remain in Jerusalem, till the day of Pentecost.* The children of God need never be perplexed about worldly matters, whilst they are obeying a positive command of God. "Their Heavenly Father knoweth that they have need of these things," and will supply their wants. We may also take this miracle as an emblematic token of the great multitude of men that should be enclosed in the Gospel net, and brought into the visible church.

Our Lord's compassion towards Peter, after his shameful fall,

* See Luke xxiv. 49.

was remarkable. His name had been particularly mentioned when his disciples were informed of his resurrection, lest consciousness of sin might make him fear that he was excluded from their number.* Jesus now publicly restored him to his office from which he had fallen. But in what manner did he restore him? By drawing from him, in the presence of all the apostles, repeated confessions of his faith and love, and re-investing him with his apostolic commission, precisely as often as Peter had publicly renounced it. Three times he put to him the searching question, "Lovest thou me?" and three times he commanded him to feed the flock; thus showing to us that all ministers of Christ should go out, with his full *authority*, and from him seek love to souls, as an important *qualification* for the sacred office.† The questions put to Peter on this occasion, and the answers he gave to them, will furnish a subject for profitable self-examination. If the Lord Jesus were to put the same question to you, that he did to Peter, and to repeat it again and again, are there none of us who would be at a loss for an answer? none to whom he might say, "I know that ye have not the love of God in you?" ‡ or are there none who at best could only say—"Lord, thou knowest that I cannot tell whether I love thee or not?" Is this a matter which you can have a doubt upon, with safety? If your heart be not with Christ—if you seek him not in earnest prayer—if you feel no desire to do his will—if you do not love his commands more than the ways of the world—if you indulge in those things which his word comdemns, how can you imagine that you love him? You never can love him till his love is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

The manner of Peter's death by martydom, is next pointed out to him. Happy Peter, who having worn out his better years in the service of Christ, stretched out his aged arms to be bound, and being carried away to tortures and to death, shed the last slow ebb of his blood, as a martyr for him "who had loved him,

* Mark xvi. 7.

† 'Here,' says Augustine, 'is a threefold confession, answerable to his threefold denial—but what is meant by "Feed my sheep?" It is as if he had said—think not upon feeding thyself—but feed them as mine—seeking not thine, but my glory by them—not thy lordship, but mine—not thy gain, but mine.' Here is no idea of Peter's supremacy—no outrage to the text, by making the *sheep*, the clergy—and the *lambs*, the people. Augustine holds with Protestants that Peter's restoration to his Apostolic office was intended, and not his supremacy. The Fathers also generally taught that the *sheep* were the more advanced believers, and the *lambs*, the weak of the flock.—See Theophylact's note on text.

‡ John v. 42.

and given himself for him." * We know not whether similar days of persecution may not arise in our days; and certainly the Scriptures prepare us to expect the raging of the ungodly in the closing part of this dispensation. It behoves us, then, to inquire whether our love to Jesus, and our confidence in his divine assistance, is so strong as will enable us to stand in the day of "fiery trial." As a token of his readiness to meet death for his sake, Jesus desired Peter to follow him, with which he readily complied. But mark how John, without any command, silently expressed by his conduct the same readiness to die for the sake of Jesus; he likewise rose and followed Jesus. Blessed humility, which allowed him only to relate the fact, without giving his motives for so doing! Man is apt to blaze abroad whatever may raise him in the estimation of his fellow worms; but it is the mark of a true Christian to shun the praise of man, and to feel happy when "he who seeth in secret" is alone acquainted with his motives and his actions. How much better to be thus quietly serving our Master, than, like Peter, inquiring, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" as if the case and affairs of others belonged to us. Christ's reply was most pointed; "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Real anxiety for souls we should feel, but not that curious prying into the state of others that takes us from our own soul's concern.

Had all the words and actions of Jesus been recorded, they would have filled a work of such enormous size, as would necessarily prevent the generality of mankind from procuring or reading it; or, according to the Jewish proverb, "the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." But, thanks to the Lord, we have all that is necessary for salvation contained in a volume so small and so cheap, that the poorest peasant may procure it, and read it, without much cost of money, or of time. May all who read these passages, be stirred up to a more diligent examination of that sacred volume—searching after Jesus, "whom to know, is life eternal."

NOTE 1, v. 15—ἀγαπᾶς με πλεῖον τούτων, "Lovest thou me more than these." Although these words may be *objectively* understood—of the *things* which are loved—yet it is more emphatic to interpret them *subjectively*, i. e. of the persons loving. If *he* ought to love most, on whom the greater kindness is bestowed; Peter, who denied the master more shamefully than all, ought to love beyond all the Apostles, when restored to God's favour, and the Apostolic office.—See Lampe's Commentary on St. John.

NOTE 2, v. 25.—Many like Origen and Whitby explain this verse by rendering χωρῆσαι—comprehended, in allusion to the mind. But as Maldonate remarks, it is not things written, but *books*, and this confines the sense of the χωρέω—to its first meaning, to give place or receive—contain. It is plainly an hyperbole and one to which the Jews were accustomed.

* Eusebius adduces proof that St. Paul was beheaded, and St. Peter crucified during Nero's persecution:—Lib. ii. chap. xxv. See also Grotius on this subject.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles forms the fifth and last of the historical books of the New Testament, and connects the Gospels with the Epistles—being a useful addition to the former, and a fit introduction to the latter. St. Luke was undoubtedly the inspired writer of this book—for he inscribes it to Theophilus, the person to whom he dedicated his Gospel—which he here calls his "former treatise." * It is evident from his mode of relating the transactions of the early Church, that he was an eye-witness of many of them, and especially that he accompanied St. Paul in his travels from Troas to Philippi,† in their way to Jerusalem,‡ and afterwards to Rome, where he remained two years during that Apostle's first imprisonment; hence we find that Luke is mentioned by him in two of his epistles, written from Rome during his confinement in prison in that city; by him also this writer is styled "the beloved physician." §

This history records the fulfilment of those predictions and promises which our Lord gave to his disciples "while he was yet with them," concerning the powers with which they should be endued—the success that should attend their labours—and the persecutions which awaited them. We have here an account of the success of the Gospel, after our Lord's death—the rapid spread which it made—the manner in which it was established—and the effects which it produced upon the world—the whole comprising a period of about thirty years. It is a re-

* See Luke i. 3, 4. ‡ Ch. xvi. 11, 12. ‡ Ch. xxi. 15.
§ Col. iv. 14; Philemon v. 24.

markable fact, that neither Jewish scribes, nor Gentile philosophers, ever attempted to write a history of the first introduction of Christianity, in order to contradict the account given by the Christians; and the omission of a contradiction by those who had need to vindicate themselves, is a confession that they had nothing to say in opposition to this plain but important history of the progress of the Gospel.

One part of this history deserves our serious attention, namely that which affords a specimen of genuine, practical religion, as exhibited in the lives of early Christians. Their zeal—their self-denial—their godly simplicity—their brotherly love, form a striking contrast to the lives of those who are Christians in the present day. Surely this ought not so to be: Christians should be alike at all times. But the fact is, those were days of persecution—these are days of worldly prosperity. The former keeps the Christian watchful and prayerful—the latter too often induces him to lay aside the arms of his warfare; and hence the comparative sickliness of our present Christianity. We are about to enter on the records of the primitive Church—which, though it commences with the conversion of a large body of the Jewish nation, soon details the introduction of the Gentiles into the visible Church. It contains a full account of the opening of the dispensation of the Spirit, and the graffing in of the Gentiles into the olive tree. Let us pray that we may thankfully receive the Gospel of peace and the promise of the Spirit, and thus prove that we are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." *

NOTE.—"The Acts of the Apostles," is as a title to this book too general—it only contains a part of St. Peter's labors, in reference to the Jews, ending with ch. xii, and a part of St. Paul's labors among the gentiles, from chap. xiii. to the end. Why God has not given us more of the Apostolic labors, we cannot decide.—See Elsley.

CHAP. I. 1—11.

CHRIST REMAINS ON EARTH FORTY DAYS BEFORE HIS ASCENSION—THE PROMISED KINGDOM.

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach. Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his

* Eph. ii. 19.

passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

St. Luke having but slightly noticed the circumstance of our Lord's ascension, when concluding his Gospel, gives us, in this first chapter of the Acts, several particulars which attended it. We learn that our Lord remained upon earth forty days after his resurrection, during which time he showed himself repeatedly to his disciples, and instructed them in "the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Having, also directed them to wait in Jerusalem, for the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, they immediately put to him a question, which, when connected with the subject of our Lord's instruction to them, would lead us to suppose, that "the kingdom," of which he had been speaking so much to them, was the glorious kingdom which is to succeed the dispensation under which we live, and which they thought would immediately be established. They asked, "Lord, wilt thou *at this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Our Lord, in his answer, does not deny that the kingdom should be restored to Israel—that the glorious promises which the prophecies reveal, should yet be fulfilled to them, but yet he checks their curiosity, saying, "It is not for *you* to know the times or the seasons." This accords with the designs of God on the subject of prophecy—the great realities held out to the Church should be our constant meditation and delight, but the *time* of their fulfilment is known only to God. The restoration of the Jews to their own land, and to more than their former glory, are the plain subjects of prophecy *—but we know not *when*

* Ezek. xxxvii. 24, 25. Amos ix. 11, 14, 15. Zeph. iii. 14—20.

this will take place. The coming of the day of God, and the setting up of the Redeemer's kingdom are promised in the word, —but we "know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." These things may be more clearly revealed at "the time of the end" *—or when the advent of Christ is at the doors—yet, in general, the Lord keeps the times and seasons in his own power, and teaches us to expect the promised glory, as the substance of our hope. Our very ignorance of the exact period tends to produce and cherish the spirit of watchfulness.

Jesus ascended in the presence of his disciples. It was not necessary that they should *see* him rise from the dead, to be convinced of his resurrection; for his continued appearances to them, and his remaining forty days on earth before he ascended, furnished them with ample evidence of this glorious truth. But they could have had no evidence of his ascension, if they had not seen it; therefore, ocular demonstration was given in the latter case, and not in the former. At the time of his ascension an extraordinary circumstance occurred. Two angels were sent to announce to the wondering disciples, that Jesus should so come again, in like manner as they had seen him ascend. And how was that? *In human form*, but not again *in suffering flesh:* the days of his mourning are ended—he ascended on high in glorified humanity, having obtained the victory over death, hell, and the grave; and now he sits at the Father's right hand, highly exalted, and pleading for his people. This same Jesus will come again, in the clouds of heaven,† as the triumphant king and the glorified head of the Church. Yes, Jesus shall come again in person—in glory, to reign over the house of Jacob, and to establish his kingdom of universal peace and righteousness. Our dispensation is only preparatory to this, and must close before it commences. All who are now born again of the Holy Spirit, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, shall be raised at Christ's coming, and reign with him over this renovated earth; while every unbelieving professor of Christianity shall be consumed by the brightness of his coming, and by the sentence of a just condemnation.‡ Are *you* a mere professor of the Gospel? Have you "a name to live, while you are dead in trespasses and sins?" Have you only been baptized with water, but not with the Spirit? Remaining in this state, there is nothing before you, but "a fearful looking-for of judgment, and of fiery indignation." Oh! turn to the Saviour,

* Dan. xii. 4. † Rev. i. 7. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 8.

while he delayeth his coming, and waits to be gracious. Are you a believer in Jesus? "Lift up your head, for your redemption draweth nigh." Trim your lamp, and gird up your straggling garments, that nothing earthly may impede your progress. "Behold! he cometh quickly. May you be enabled to say with scriptural confidence—"Amen: even so, come, Lord Jesus."

NOTE on v. 3.—The discourses of Christ during the forty days are not recorded, it is in vain therefore to conjecture. His great object was to prove himself alive by several manifestations. Lightfoot gives eight, but Gresswell shews that there were nine such after his resurrection.—See his Harmony and Dissertations.

CHAP. I. 12—26.

THE DISCIPLES RETURN TO JERUSALEM AND CONTINUE IN PRAYER—PETER'S ADDRESS TO THEM—MATTHIAS IS CHOSEN IN THE PLACE OF JUDAS.

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men *and* brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

IMMEDIATELY after our Lord's ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem, which was distant from Mount Olivet about one

mile, called by the Jews, a "sabbath-day's journey," because that was the distance (two thousand cubits) which lay between the ark and the camp of Israel, while they travelled through the wilderness; * so that when they went up to the ark to worship on the sabbath, they had to walk a distance of one mile; hence it was called "a sabbath-day's journey." The eleven apostles now dwelt together, and were joined in their devotions by those pious women who had been such faithful followers of Jesus. This is the last place in Scripture that Mary the mother of Jesus, is named; and here, only, as one of the company who joined in prayer, but without any peculiar distinction, or authority over other believers.

In the portion of Scripture now read, we find Peter addressing the Church at Jerusalem, (which consisted of one hundred and twenty persons,) upon the apostacy of Judas, showing that the Scripture was fulfilled in him,† and that his place among the apostles should be supplied by a new election. The circumstances which Peter, in the course of this discourse, recals to our recollection concerning Judas, are truly awful—"He was numbered with the apostles," "and had obtained part of their ministry." Judas, thus secretly a thief and traitor, yet had a part or office, in the apostolic order. How possible is it to have the highest office in Christ's service—to be, like Judas, an apostle, or like those who are now next in authority—the bishops or overseers of the Church—and yet personally to be destitute of love to God, and even unfaithful to such an high trust. The possession of such an office will only increase the condemnation of those who are idle shepherds—feeding themselves, but careless about the flock; yea, we might prophesy in the name of Jesus, and yet perish in his wrath—our words may be made a blessing to others, and at the same time add to our own condemnation! This is an awful subject, and ought to excite great searchings of heart in every one of us. The example of Judas stands as a warning, not to trust in any mere outward appearance—unless our *hearts* are in the cause of Christ, we shall act as traitors and deceivers, and shall finally perish. If there are any amongst us, who are dissemblers with God, let such remember, that assuredly, sooner or later, they shall be detected, and receive their just reward. Let each of us judge ourselves, "that we be not judged of the Lord."

The description of the death of the wretched Judas is most

* Josh. iii. 4.

† See Psalm xli. 9, and cix. 8.

appalling. He not only committed suicide by hanging himself, but it appears that he afterwards fell down by some accident and burst asunder. The Lord thus made known the miserable end of this traitor as a warning to others—the field also, which was purchased by the money given to Judas for betraying his master, was the very spot where he died, and was probably buried. How often do the wicked prepare destruction for themselves, when they think to destroy Christ's cause; above all, how awful to die in sin and rebellion—of such, God will say as he said of Judas—"they are gone to their own place."

The wretched Judas having thus made void his office, Peter moved the company, that another person be chosen to fill up his place. The person required to fill up this vacant station, was "one who had companied with the disciples, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst them;"—that is, one who had loved the company of Christ, and his followers—one who had been much with Christ, from his baptism to his resurrection, and who might be an authentic witness of that most important fact. We next remark the very solemn manner in which they chose this new apostle. As all the others had been particularly named by our Saviour himself, it was necessary that he who was to act in the same office, should be, as much as they could further it, chosen by the Lord also. Therefore, after having fixed upon two pious men, Barsabas and Matthias, who had been constant followers of Christ; they then earnestly prayed that the Lord would show which of them he chose to take part of the ministry with the eleven apostles; after prayer we are told they cast lots, and that the choice fell upon Matthias.

Lots were used among the Jews, by divine appointment, for dividing inheritances,* for composing differences, and for determining elections; and how casual soever it seemed, God was the undoubted determiner of it. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." † *We* have no warrant from Scripture, for appealing to the Lord's decision in trifling matters, *by the casting of lots;* yet ought we to refer every thing to his choice, *by prayer*, as the best means of finding out the will of God in all our difficulties and plans. And surely the lot, which both under the Old and New Testament dispensation has been used, and owned as a solemn and religious appeal to God's providence, ought not to be used in such frivolous concerns, or in so irreverent a manner, as it constantly is, by those who "have no fear of God before their eyes."

* See Joshua xviii. 10. † Prov. xvi. 33.

CHAP. II. 1—21.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST—THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT—THE PROPHECY OF JOEL EXPLAINED.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all *ye* that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophecy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

THE ceremonies of the Jewish ritual were not only instructive to the nation of Israel, but typical of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. Three yearly feasts were appointed by God, at which all the men amongst the Jews were required to attend; the feasts of the Passover, of Pentecost, and of Tabernacles.* At the first, the lamb was killed, which was a type of the death of Jesus "the Lamb of God," whose blood, when sprinkled on

* Deut. xvi. 16.

the sinner, preserves from death eternal. On the third day also, after the Passover lamb was killed, "on the morrow after the Sabbath," the priest was to "wave," or lift up, an offering of first-fruits,* which evidently prefigures the resurrection of Jesus—"the first-fruits of them that slept," on the third day after his death. The second feast was held fifty days after the wave-offering just mentioned, and hence called "Pentecost;" on this occasion the Jews were to present a meat-offering of the first-fruits of their corn.† This was a type of the event related in this chapter, which occurred fifty-days after the resurrection of Jesus, when the first fruits of the Christian Church were consecrated to the Lord, and when the dispensation of the Spirit commenced, by a miraculous effusion, in virtue of which three thousand persons were added to the Church. The last of the three feasts was typical of events still future, when the Jews shall be restored, and celebrate their deliverance from a worse than Egyptian bondage.

The feast of Pentecost, about which we are here more particularly concerned, was first instituted to commemorate the giving of the law from Mount Sinai, on the fiftieth day after the Exodus from Egypt: so likewise on the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus, was the Spirit poured out from on high, enabling the apostles to speak in different languages, to the vast crowds from different nations who were assembled at Jerusalem. It was God's wise arrangement that this full outpouring of the Spirit should occur at one of the great feasts, when such numbers of Jews were gathered together from all parts; innumerable witnesses were thus prepared to testify to the truth of this fact, and a wide circulation of the Gospel was effected by the return of these converted Jews to their different countries.

With how much attention and delight should we read the history of this glorious event, so frequently referred to in the predictions of our Lord, and of so great importance in the Christian cause—the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit! It is impossible to estimate too highly "the coming of the Holy Ghost" as manifested on the day of Pentecost. Hitherto the Church of God had only received the drops of the shower, but now the rain descends in abundance and with refreshing power. The inward life did exist in the souls of believers under the Old Testament dispensation—but they do not seem to have known the Holy Ghost as the Comforter. The

* Lev. xxiii. 11. † Deut. xvi. 9, 10.

larger measure of the Spirit's presence and power will explain this title, and the history of the early Church practically shews that more light, more liberty, more holiness were bestowed on believers since that memorable day. Blessed be God, we are called to enjoy this fellowship of the Spirit, and if we do not possess the full measure which was promised, we must chide our own unbelief, and stir up our hearts to greater prayer for the Comforter's presence. The emblematic signs of the gift of the Comforter were most significant. He came down upon the disciples as a mighty, rushing wind, to signify the powerful energy of his operations, whereby so great a revolution was to be effected in the world. He fell upon them in "tongues of fire," cloven, or divided into several parts, to denote his causing them to speak, with fluency, languages which they had never learned, so that they might publish the Gospel among those distant nations, to which the providence of God might send them. The wind set forth the power and freedom of the operations of the Spirit, and the cloven tongues of fire declared his gracious, dispensing office in the Church, and the purifying effects of his indwelling presence. We have no other instance of such a full outpouring of the Spirit in the New Testament or in the history of the Church. The effects of this great event were marked by the conversion of three thousand souls to the faith. It seemed necessary to give a *peculiar* display of miraculous power on that occasion, because it marked the "coming of the Holy Ghost," the "baptism" of the Church with the Comforter's power,* and the commencement of the dispensation of the Spirit, which will continue until the setting up of Christ's kingdom at his coming.†

This miracle produced different effects upon the Jews; some wondered, others scoffed, and attributed it to drunkenness; but Peter vindicated himself and his brethren, not with words of reproach, but of meekness and sobriety; and proved that this miracle had occurred in fulfilment of a prophecy uttered by the Prophet Joel. By referring to the passage from which Peter quotes,‡ we shall find that this prophecy, like many others, has a series of fulfilments, each more complete than the former, and that it had only a partial accomplishment at the day of Pente-

* Matt. iii. 11.

† No wonder then that the Church should in all ages have celebrated this great event at the feast of Whitsuntide, as we do to this day in the Anglican Church. See Bingham's Christian Antiquities, vol. vii. p. 126.

‡ Joel ii. 28, 32.

cost. The passage in Joel includes "the great and terrible day of the Lord, and the pouring out of the Spirit on *all flesh* :" but the events recorded in our chapter refer to the first-fruits from the Jewish nation to the Christian Church, and which was only a small part of that nation. The prophet also describes a state of things which has not yet taken place,* and then adds—"*afterwards* I will pour out my Spirit"—so that we must expect the full restoration of the Jews before this last outpouring will take place. Then all shall know the Lord—"his people Israel shall no longer be a reproach among the heathen"—and the very heathen themselves shall be converted to God. The Lord Jesus will then usher in his kingdom of universal peace and righteousness, as the period of blessedness to the world.

But are you not interested in what this chapter records? Surely you are. Joel's prophecy has not yet been fulfilled, but the time of its accomplishment is fast approaching; "the great and terrible day of the Lord" is at hand. And where shall you be in that day? Where but amongst those who shall call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them, unless you now obtain peace with God, through Jesus Christ, by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Those who shall reign with Jesus hereafter, must have the Spirit's stamp upon their hearts, which will be "the earnest of their inheritance." Oh! hasten to Jesus in prayer. Tarry not, nor look behind with a longing desire upon any earthly thing. Let the ungodly remember the destruction of Sodom, and its inhabitants; let Christians "remember Lot's wife."

NOTE v. 3.—διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι—in our version "cloven tongues"—as if a flame, in the form of a tongue, split or divided, rested on each. It is better rendered "disparted flames," i. e. divided out to each person from one common source.—See Robinson's Lexicon, and Rösenmuller's Scholia.

CHAP. II. 22—47.

PETER PREACHES THE RESURRECTION AND FUTURE KINGDOM OF CHRIST—A GREAT NUMBER CONVERTED AND BAPTIZED—THE UNITY OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by

* Joel ii. 23, 27.

wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

We have here the conclusion of St. Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost—the miraculous conversion which this discourse produced—and an account of the devotion and brotherly love of these primitive Christians.

On examining Peter's discourse, we shall find that he first dwells on the crucifixion of Jesus, which was effected by the hands of wicked men, but in accordance with the determinate counsel of God—a declaration which unites in a striking manner the designs of God and the responsibility of man—since he

overruled, in a remarkable way, the deeds of the wicked to the accomplishment of man's redemption. The apostle then proceeds to the resurrection of Christ, and shows that David, in the Spirit of prophecy, foretold this glorious event—saying, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in *hell,* neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* David could not say this of himself, for he is dead and buried, and saw corruption; but he spake of the resurrection of Jesus. The word *hell* is taken from an old word *hele*, to hide, and may be used for any concealed place, as the word in the original also means.† It is applied in Scripture chiefly to three places—the *hell* of punishment, from which there is no deliverance ‡—the habitation appointed for all living, viz. the grave §—and lastly, to the place of separate spirits who rest with God, which is often called Hades. It is evident that our Lord's human soul went with the penitent thief to this Hades or Paradise,‖ and that this place is intended in Peter's quotation from the Psalm. On the third day Christ was raised up again—his soul was not left in a disembodied state, but united to his body, which did not see the least corruption. Thus far the prophecy was fulfilled. But mark, now, the reason which Peter gives for the *necessity* of Christ's resurrection; because, up to the time of his death, he had not fulfilled that prophecy, which declared that he should sit upon the throne of David,¶ and therefore it was necessary he should rise for that purpose. David "seeing this before"—seeing that he should not sit upon his throne at his first advent, or before his death, "spoke of his resurrection" as necessary. Peter tells us, and so does David, that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, till that time arrives when his foes shall be made his footstool. But has Jesus yet accomplished the purpose for which David said he should be raised from the dead? Has he yet sat upon David's throne? You may say he sits upon a throne in heaven. But was the throne of David in heaven? But you may say it only means that Christ should reign in the hearts of his people. But where is the believer's heart called "the throne of David?" Did David ever reign in a believer's heart? Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God; he

* Psalm xvi. 8—11.

† αδης for αιδης—a place not seen—same as Sheol in Hebrew—usually called by the ancients, *Hades*, or place of separate spirits; the context must decide whether it refers to the righteous or the wicked. See Schleusner's Lexicon, and Campbell's Dissertation on the word. Dis. vi. part ii. vol. i. on the four Gospels.

‡ Luke xvi. 23.

§ See Psalm xlix. 15, marginal reading.

‖ Luke xxiii. 43

¶ Psalm cxxxii. 11.

waits there until he gathers his elect from among the Gentiles; then shall he appear for the destruction of apostate worshippers, and shall "make his foes his footstool;" and then, as St. James tells us, he will "build up the tabernacle of David that is fallen;"* he will "restore the kingdom of Israel;" he will gather his scattered and outcast people, Israel, and *then* will he fulfil the word of prophecy,† and "sit upon the throne of David.

We are told that when Peter explained this prophecy, the people "were pricked in their heart, and said, men and brethren, what shall we do?" What a blessed fruit of faithful preaching, accompanied by the power of the Spirit! The word of God is then like "the two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." This is real and godly conviction, and the sure precurser of a saving faith in the Son of God, whether it be found in one soul, or, as in this case, in a vast multitude. Let us observe how readily they entered into God's ordinances—"They that gladly received his word were baptized," as the sign of the blessing received, and a seal of their interest in the promises of the Gospel; into which state of church fellowship they were to introduce their children; for the promise, Peter declared, was unto them as well as to their parents—and if so, the sacrament which set forth the promised Comforter, was the privilege of their children. This passage not only warrants infant-baptism, in the fullest manner, but holds out a great encouragement to believing parents, to bring their offspring to that holy sacrament, with the assurance of a divine blessing.

We should carefully study what is here related of the early Christians, both as to church-communion and to devotedness of life. There was then but one church, known by the four marks, apostolic doctrine—fellowship or one brotherhood—breaking of bread in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper—and prayer, evidently public prayer. (see verse 46.) All departure from this model has been Satan's work, who aims at division. They also gave up their goods, and cast them into a common fund, because a necessity existed. We should be ready to do the same, if the Lord demands, and if not, we should consider that all belongs to him, and hold ourselves in readiness to give liberally in the cause of God's truth, and in relieving the wants of our fellow sufferers. Let us pray without ceasing for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to produce the same blessed effects upon

* Acts xv. 16. † See Ezek. xxxvii. 21, 25.

us that it did upon them: that we, too, may "continue stedfast in the apostle's doctrine," and in fellowship with all true believers: that we may use hospitality without grudging, and communicate liberally to our needy brethren: and that "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we may do all to the glory of God, in gladness and singleness of heart."

CHAP. III.

A LAME MAN RESTORED BY PETER—HE EXPLAINS THE MIRACLE TO THE PEOPLE—HE PREACHES THE NEED OF REPENTANCE AND THE RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS.

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *being* the ninth *hour*. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted *him* up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *him* go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did *it*, as *did* also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet

shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

It is mentioned towards the end of the last chapter, that "many signs and wonders were done by the apostles;" and here we have one of them given as an example. It was a miracle of healing performed upon a poor cripple, who was lame from his birth. Peter and John "went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer." We read of three stated hours of prayer among the Jews, the *third* hour, or about *nine* in the morning of our time, when they offered the morning sacrifice;" * the *sixth* hour, or about *twelve* o'clock; † and the *ninth* hour, as here mentioned, when they offered the evening sacrifice. What a rebuke to professing Christians, who cultivate so little the opportunities of assembling in the house of prayer. It was good for the poor cripple to be even near the house of prayer; ‡ but how great was the honour of the apostles, thus to be the instruments of his recovery, and of setting forth God's marvellous power. They were going to God's temple when thus employed, and we may conclude from this, that we are most likely to be useful when most earnest in seeking God. The poor cripple asked *alms* of the apostles, but Peter's answer was striking—"Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Observe the poverty of these servants of Christ, who were selected from the poor and unlearned, to prove to us that the Gospel owed its success, not to the wisdom or influence of men, but to "the power of God." §

Many imagine that because they have not *money* to give to the distressed, they are therefore excused from rendering them any assistance. But surely there are many ways in which we

* See Chap. ii. 15. † Chap. x. 9.

‡ He was laid at the gate called *Beautiful*, which is thus described by Josephus. 'The magnitude of the other (nine) gates were equal, but that over the Corinthian gate, which opened on the east over against the gate of the Holy house itself was much larger—for its height was fifty cubits, and its doors forty cubits—and it was adorned after a costly manner as having much richer and thicker plates of gold and silver than the rest.' Bel. lib. v. chap. 5. Sect. 3.

§ 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

might make ourselves of service to them. We might visit them in sickness and affliction; we might read to them the word of God, and pray with them, and pray for them. If we feel no disposition to act in this manner, it is because we have not the Spirit of Christ, and not knowing the value of a Saviour ourselves, we are at no pains about making him known to others.

The people, we are told, wondered greatly at the miracle, imagining, like many ignorant people in our day, that the healing virtue came from man; but Peter honestly disclaimed having any merit in the action, and gave all the glory to that Jesus, of whom he boldly charges them as being the murderers. The Christian minister, in his preaching, acts as Peter did. He says to those who lie crippled by Satan's fetters, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The power to obey must come from Jesus, and therefore to Jesus belongs all the praise of their salvation. Let those who are thus addressed, make the effort as the man did, of whom we read; and, like him, they shall soon have cause to enter the temple with joy, "walking, and leaping, and praising God."

Peter charitably attributes the conduct of the Jews towards Jesus to ignorance. But did he mean to make an excuse for their sins? No: for he immediately says, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." If ignorance had excused their crime, repentance would have been needless. Ignorance will not excuse sinners before God. The Jews, who sinned in ignorance, were called on to "repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out;" and all who sin, and die impenitent, will be punished by God, because their ignorance was wilful; "they loved darkness rather than light."

Two remarkable periods in the history of Christ's mediation are here mentioned by St. Peter; first, the period of his coming in suffering flesh, which had been foretold by all the prophets, and which had been fulfilled at his resurrection. Another period is spoken of, when Jesus should again be sent; * and this can be no other than his second advent, in glory; for in connexion with this event, St. Peter, speaking to the Jews, says, "the times of refreshing shall come." We may learn what these "times of refreshing" (or, as it more literally signifies, "of reanimation") are, by consulting the prophet Ezekiel, where a valley full of dry bones is shown to the prophet, and he is di-

* Compare v. 18 and 19.

rected to preach to these bones, and he does so, and they revive; and he is then told that these dry bones represented the whole house of Israel, and that as the dry bones were made to live, so the time shall come when dispersed Judah, and outcast Israel, shall be converted to God, and live.* This is the time of which St. Peter speaks—"the time of re-animation," or "refreshing," and which is connected in prophecy with the second advent of Christ, "as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." †

But St. Peter speaks of another event, connected with Christ's coming, viz. "the times of restitution of all things," What means this? It evidently refers to that blessed state, when he that sits upon the throne shall say, "Behold, I make all things new." ‡ Creation shall be delivered from its groaning condition—the bitter fruit of sin.§ God's ancient people shall be restored to their own land, and shall be blessed there with privileges and favour far beyond what they ever enjoyed. The saints of God shall reign with that glorified king, and Satan being cast out, all nations shall acknowledge Jesus to be Lord and Christ. St. Peter declares, that "*all* the prophets," from Samuel onwards, "have foretold of these days"—the days of Christ's second advent. Oh! look to the prophecies—that neglected portion of Scripture! There is a mine of wealth to be found there:—go, and search for it, and you will be amply repaid for your pains; and be assured that there is no study of more *practical* utility to be found; mere curious inquiries will leave men unsanctified, and without real benefit; but a prayerful study of prophecy will brighten our hope of glory, and wean us from sin, which now destroys the earth. We shall then know that Christ has been sent to bless his people, "in turning them away from their iniquities."

NOTE v. 19.—Instead of rendering ὅπως ἂν—"when" it is better to give the usual meaning, "in order that"—and so the times of refreshing (ἀναψύξεως) or restitution shall follow on the repentance of the Jews.

* Ezek. xxxvii. 1, 4, 9, 14.
† Rom. xi. 26.
‡ Rev. xxi. 5.
§ Rom. viii. 21, 22, 23.

CHAP. IV. 1—22.

THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL—PETER AND JOHN PERSECUTED—THEIR BOLDNESS AT THE JEWISH COUNCIL.

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them *is* manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny *it*. But that it spread no farther among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all *men* glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

THE zealous exertions of the two apostles provoked the resentment of the priests and rulers, and we read that they were grieved that Jesus was preached unto the people. They thought that when they had put Christ to such an ignominous death, his disciples would, ever afterwards, be afraid and ashamed to own

him; and now it vexed them to find that they were disappointed; that the Gospel, instead of losing ground by their wicked devices, seemed rapidly advancing; since five thousand souls now belonged to the church, who before the day of Pentecost were in ignorance and unbelief. Thus we often see that God overrules persecution to his church at large, and also to individuals, as a means of stirring up and increasing the growth of *vital* religion in both.

We further hear of the imprisonment of these two zealous apostles. On the day following they stood arraigned before the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, being called to answer for their conduct. Peter was again the speaker, and displayed an uncommon degree of courage. We are told that the cause of his boldness was, that "he was filled with the Holy Ghost." St. Peter, when relying on himself, was frightened into a denial of his blessed Master, by the question of a poor weak woman: *now* being filled with the Holy Ghost, he confounded and silenced his powerful adversaries. How woefully weak are we, when we depend on our own strength; but how *enabled* to do all things, when Christ strengthens us! Peter openly declared, that though Christ, the corner-stone, had been set at nought by the Jewish teachers, or builders, meaning the rulers, high priests, and scribes, whom he addressed; yet that there was no other name under heaven given, whereby men could be saved. Let us now pause and consider these words, for they concern us deeply. It is evident that there is but one way of salvation: is it not then of the greatest importance to each of us to know whether we are in that only right way, or not? It is through Christ Jesus *alone* that we can be saved. Christ himself says, as do also his apostles, that He is "the way, the truth, and the life, and that no man can come to the Father, but by him." We are by nature, born in sin, and, consequently are enemies to God, who hateth all iniquity. It is then only through Christ that we can be reconciled to God. Christ has taken upon himself the sinner's curse, that he may invest us with his righteousness. Blessed be God, that whilst it is the only rock of salvation, it is sure and stedfast to all who apply to it faithfully.

The undaunted courage of the apostles, Peter and John, whom the chief priests and scribes despised as low and illiterate persons, quite confounded the great council, and they knew not what steps to take. But let us observe these words: "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Their boldness in fully declaring that Gospel which was com-

mitted to them, by their beloved Master, and the miracle they had performed through the power of his name, showed plainly to all those who surrounded them, "whose they were, and whom they served." Thus will it ever be with the true followers of Christ; they will show by their lives and conversation, that they are the Lord's servants: they will shine as lights in the world, and all who surround them, even their very enemies, must perceive and take knowledge of them, that they are Christ's. Would to God that this were more the case with us, and that all who are joined to the Lord in bonds of outward communion, were thus one in Spirit with him, and walked more as Christ walked.

We further read, that as the man who had been healed was on the spot, ready to attest the reality of the miracle, the council could neither deny it, nor the conclusion that was drawn from it. To conceal their perplexity, therefore, they ordered the apostles to withdraw, and having consulted what they should do, they agreed that it would be in vain to deny the miracle, as it was manifest to all that it was wrought by Peter and John, in the name, and by the power of Christ: it was, however, necessary for them to do something to stop the progress of the Gospel; and, calling the apostles, they strictly enjoined them not to propagate christianity any more. Had the apostles' doctrine been of human contrivance, it is probable that it would have been instantly suppressed; but as the work was of God, they could not overthrow it: all their rage was vain—all their threatenings ineffectual. Peter and John stood unmoved, and declared their determination never to desist from the cause in which they were engaged, appealing even to this wicked assembly for the justification of their conduct; inquiring whether it was right in the sight of God, to hearken unto them more than unto God. The example of the apostles in this place, should be particularly attended to by us. The majority of persons are much more concerned to act and live for the world, than for God. How much oftener do we hear it said, "What would the world think or say of me, if I acted so?" than, "What would God think of me?" What a vain, inconsistent creature, then, is man! Should not the knowledge of this humble us, and show us the danger of being left for a moment to ourselves; and should it not lead us to pray, that God would so influence our hearts, by a sense of love in obeying him, as might prevent us from hearkening to those who would endeavour to draw us from that way which conscience, instructed by the word of God, would point out?

CHAP. IV. 23—37.

THE CHURCH JOINS IN UNITED PRAYER—GOD ANSWERS THE SAME—THE UNITY AND LOVE OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word; By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

It is supposed that the company to which the apostles returned, consisted of the hundred and twenty persons before mentioned, who probably were assembled to pray in their behalf: and now when they joined their brethren, after telling them every thing that had happened, they all, with one accord, lifted up their voices to God in prayer and thanksgiving. What a lively representation of prayer is here offered to us, in this pious assembly of Christ's true disciples! When we consider the earnest and united manner in which they addressed the throne of grace, should we not feel shame and confusion, in looking into our own hearts, and finding them so cold, so lifeless, and indifferent in our approach to God's holy presence. How often, when kneeling before the throne of Grace, and our mouths uttering a solemn prayer, are

our hearts dwelling upon earthly cares and business, or pursuing the thoughts of our vain pleasures. There are some who feel deep distress and sorrow at heart, that their prayers are so little what they ought to be; yet there are many others who are total strangers to these feelings of compunction for their lifeless devotions, and are quite satisfied when they have daily performed this mere formal outward ceremony, as if there was a merit in so doing; but let such remember that their prayers are a mockery, and can obtain nothing from that God who searcheth and knoweth the heart. Bring no more, therefore, such vain oblations, such heartless devotions, before the Lord, for he cannot receive them.

The manner in which Peter applies the words of the second Psalm, is one proof out of many, that though the words of these sacred songs might, in some degree, have referred to particular acts of David's life, yet they were prophetical of Christ, or of his church—a great number of them referring to events which have never yet been accomplished. Let us further observe, that the apostles' prayer is not, "Lord, behold their threatenings, and silence them;" their prayer is rather, "behold their threatenings, and animate us to speak thy word with boldness, by stretching forth thy hand to heal." The miracles being the exercise of divine power, were for the encouragement of the church, and the rebuke of God's enemies. The out-stretched arm of God is the defence of believers in times of danger, and their great support in every season of sorrow. Let us therefore pray that we may go on with cheerfulness, perseverance, and courage, in whatever trials or temptations we may meet with in our walk through life: and let us ever bear in mind, that those who really desire God's strength, and ask for it, may depend upon having it granted to them.

We next hear of the gracious answer which God gave to this address; not in word, but in power. The shaking of the place where they were assembled, was designed to strike an awe upon them, and to give them a sensible token that God was with them of a truth. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word with boldness. This was an example of the performance of that promise, that "God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask," for it was in answer to prayer that these disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost. Oh! that each of us were persuaded to live in an actual dependance upon the grace of God, according as the necessity of every day requires. Surely we need to be supplied with divine grace, to strengthen

us for the daily conflicts against our manifold sins and temptations.

What a beautiful description is given in the latter part of this chapter, of the love and harmony which reigned amongst these first christians? "They were all of one heart, and of one soul!" What a contrast is this, to the manner in which many who are called christians divide and separate from the branch of the catholic or universal church established in this country, and thus introduce disunion and contentions instead of cultivating unity and love. It is also lamentable to see how many families are divided and distracted by the unkindness, envy, and resentment of the individuals which compose them. Let us question ourselves whether we nourish or give way to uncharitable feelings towards those around us. "By this," says our Lord, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another;" if we have not this love and affection towards each other, we may be certain that we are not Christ's true followers. We find that these first disciples had all their goods and worldly possessions in common; the church was then under persecution, and in its early stage, and, therefore, a common fund like this was necessary. It does not appear that it continued long, and it is certainly not *binding* on other periods of the church—yet should we catch the spirit of this willing distribution, and remember that we are but stewards who are to manage and distribute what is intrusted to our care, in the service of our Lord and Master, and for the benefit of men.

NOTE v. 36.—Barnabas is mentioned as one who gave up his property; as a Levite he could have none to part with, but as a rich proprietor of Cyprus, his native place, he had, and he willingly threw all into the common fund.

CHAP. V. 1—16.

THE SIN OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA—GOD'S TERRIBLE JUDGMENT ON THEM—A WARNING TO OTHERS.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the Apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And

the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people: (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women;) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

It is necessary for us to have a precise idea of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, that we may be warned by the awful example which their history affords. It was stated in the last chapter that many in the church sold their possessions, and laid the whole produce of them at the apostles' feet, to make a fund for the support of their needy brethren. Barnabas, in particular, is mentioned as having done this. Doubtless their generosity gained them great credit in the infant church; and Ananias and Sapphira were anxious to come in for a share of this honourable distinction. They sold their estate therefore: but not being able to trust God for their future support, or not choosing to relinquish all their temporal comforts, they agreed to keep back part of the price, and to present only a certain portion of it to the apostles. Wishing, however, to appear as eminent as others, they professed to give the whole produce; thus endeavouring to obtain the same credit as others, without making their sacrifice. This was their sin; a mixture of ostentation, of covetousness, and of unbelief; a seeking of credit which they did not deserve: and a pretending to liberality which they did not possess—their love of man's praise led them to make great sacrifices—but their want of love to God made them keep *part* from him, when he demanded all. This is a true picture of hypocrisy—a dreadful sin—to which Satan often tempts the professed followers of Christ. It will carry men to great apparent heights of virtue; it will urge them to laborious exertions, and reconcile them to painful sacrifices; but God who seeth the

heart will abhor all such offerings, and account them no better than that which Ananias and Sapphira presented to him.

God not unfrequently exposes hypocrites to shame in this world—what must have been the surprise of Ananias and Sapphira, and of all their friends too, when the act which appeared so excellent, was proved so faulty, and was visited with so awful a judgment! Let us endeavour to realize that scene, and we shall have some faint idea of the hypocrite's feelings in the day of judgment. We may easily deceive men; but God cannot be mocked: to him every secret thought is open, and at last he will tear away every mask of deception, and expose to view the secret thoughts of men's hearts.* Oh! how fearful will that discovery be? what lurking sin, unseen by man, shall be brought out—what vengeance shall fall on the unholy and deceitful professors of Christ's name! The judgment of God on Ananias and Sapphira was indeed appalling—but this was to show how God will avenge sin committed against light and knowledge. They are said "to lie to the Holy Ghost," as if they could impose on him—and they are said to *tempt* him, as if it was doubtful whether He could discern their treachery; but the Holy Ghost is God, and from him nothing can be hid—moreover he is the author of the brightest dispensation ever given to man, and, therefore, the sin of hypocrisy is now peculiarly hateful to God. How awfully will the fire of divine wrath be poured out on deceivers in the day of Christ—surely we should remember that God "requireth truth in the inward parts," and, therefore, that all hypocrites are "heaping up wrath against the day of wrath." †

Let us also observe how soon the outward church was infected by false members. Can we be surprised that in all subsequent ages the tares were found so thickly sown with the wheat, when such an event as this happened before one year's history of the early church had elapsed? Let us search our own hearts in the sight of God, that we may neither deceive others by false professions, nor delude ourselves by having a name to live without the power of true godliness.

* See Rom. ii. 16. † See Job xxxvi. 13.

CHAP. V. 17—42.

GOD SENDS HIS ANGELS TO THE APOSTLES IN PRISON—THEY PREACH THE WORD BOLDLY—THREATENED BY THE COUNCIL—RETURN TO THEIR OWN COMPANY.

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison-doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand, *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. When they heard *that*, they were cut *to the heart*, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, *even* as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to

suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Among the various things which operate in forming decision of character, there is nothing so powerful as religion. The fear of God will banish all other fear, and the love of God will regulate our attachment to earthly things. Persons actuated by other principles are changed by outward circumstances; but religion will give a uniform direction to all we do or say, like that of the needle to the pole. We see this strongly illustrated in the case of Peter and the other apostles. During their Master's lifetime they were destitute of a full religious principle, and were therefore weak and changeable; but when instructed by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were brought under the power and influence of religion, and hence their ardent zeal, unwearied exertion, and uniform boldness in their Master's service. *We* shall never be, in any degree, like them, till, by the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, our minds receive a taste for, and a direction towards, heavenly things.

The Jewish rulers being filled with indignation, cast all the apostles into the common prison. Yet no prison-walls could exclude that God whom they served, nor could any bonds detain these devoted servants of Jesus. God sent his angel to release them from their confinement. Let the servants of Christ take comfort from the apostles' deliverance. There is no prison so dark, or so strong, but God can both visit his people in it, and, if he pleases, take them out of it; there are no afflictions so great, no distress or suffering so severe, but God will assuredly comfort his people under them, or deliver them out of them.

The apostles were charged by the Lord's messenger to go and preach in the temple: this they accordingly did, though nothing was so likely to increase the persecution against them; and let their example teach us that when we have clearly been shown the path of duty, our business is then to keep close to it, and cheerfully trust God with our safety, how difficult or dangerous soever our way may appear. Being again taken before the council, they maintained, as on the former occasion, that no command of men should ever prevent their preaching the gospel of Jesus; and now, encouraged by the divine interference in their behalf, they more boldly charged their judges with the murder of Jesus —at the same time holding him forth as the exalted Son of God, through whom they might obtain repentance and forgiveness. Let us remember, that it is through this same Jesus that repen-

tance and forgiveness is preached to us; and it ought to encourage us to draw nigh to the exalted Saviour in prayer and faith, that he is so ready to bestow a full remission of all sin, and that inward change of heart which humbles the sinner, and leads, explicitly, to the fulness of Christ—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find:" renounce all self-dependence, and cast yourselves as ruined sinners upon that Jesus, who, if approached and solicited in this humble spirit, will "give you repentance and forgiveness of sins."

The members of the Jewish Council were so enraged at the apostles' fearless conduct, that they plotted their destruction; but God, who is never at a loss for an instrument to effect his purposes, raised up one of their own members, in the person of Gamaliel, to plead the cause of his servants. This man being noted for his judgment and prudence, was attended to. He argued from the case of two impostors—Theudas, and Judas of Galilee,* who, under false colours, had allured many followers, to their destruction—that if the apostles' doctrine had as little foundation in truth as that of those men, they would share the same fate: but that if they were the servants of God, as they professed to be, it would be worse than idle to oppose them, for it would be a vain attempt to overcome Omnipotence. Well would it be if all who are labouring to check the progress of divine truth, would learn a lesson from Gamaliel, and would calmly consider whether they are not fighting against God. Religion, *in the heart*, and reduced to *practice*, is the work of God in that person who possesses it. They, therefore, who oppose that work, are rashly contending with God.

The Jewish council reluctantly adopted the advice of Gamaliel, and refrained from putting the apostles to death; yet they showed their malice by beating them. This persecution, however, in no degree intimidated them, for, notwithstanding all the threats of their enemies they returned to the church, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for their Master's name; nor did they cease to preach the gospel of Christ, both in public and private, leaving an example to all ministers of the gospel, that Christ, the Saviour of sinners, should be the great subject of their instructions, the centre of all their doctrines, and the favourite theme of their social conversation.

* Theudas is thought to be the same as Judas, who sought the sovereignty of Judæa, after Herod's death—made insurrection and was put to death. Judas the Gaulonite opposed the levying of taxes by Cyrenius, for which he was also cut off. See Josephus' Wars, lib. ii. chap. 4. sect. 1, and Antiq. lib. xviii. chap. 1.

CHAP. VI.

THE MURMURING OF THE GRECIAN CONVERTS AGAINST THE HEBREWS—THE APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS—THE CHARACTER OF STEPHEN.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom ye may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them. And the word of God increased: and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him*, and caught him, and brought *him* to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: For we have heard him say, That this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Though we hear, in the first verse of this chapter, that many disciples were added to the Church, yet we also hear of murmuring and discontent amongst some of them. The first contention in this Christian Church was caused by a jealousy about the distribution of money; the Jews of Greece considering that partiality was shown to the poor widows of Judea.* How soon did strife and contention appear in the Church—even as hypocrisy manifested itself in the case of Ananias—painful forewarnings of what might be expected in succeeding ages, to the great

* Lightfoot shews that the Grecians or Hellenists (ἑλληνισταὶ) were Jews who were scattered among the Greek or Western Countries, and understood only the Greek language—having lost the use of the Hebrew or Chaldee. Works, vol. ii. p. 661.

dishonour of the cause of religion. How melancholy is it that the trifles of this world should have so much power in distracting the attention of, and even causing vexation to, those who are the Lord's servants. We see how ready the apostles were to remedy the evil complained of, by choosing out seven men of good report to take charge of the matter. They were, themselves, so occupied in the great work of preaching the Gospel, that they had no time to give up to any less important occupation. It would not have been right in them to neglect the business of feeding souls with the bread of life, to attend to the work of relieving the poor: they could not "leave the word of God, and serve tables;" their determination was to give "themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." What a lesson is this to all ministers of the Gospel, that they should keep themselves separate from *all* worldly occupations.

These seven men are usually termed "Deacons," because they ministered to the Church, and helped the apostles, which well agrees with the qualifications that Paul declares ought to be found in this order of ministers.* They were selected by the people, because first chosen to distribute the charitable funds of the Church, and, therefore, they must needs be known as men of good report. They were, however, *appointed* by the apostles, as all other officers of the Church were; and as it is said "they were full of the Holy Ghost," it is justly conjectured that they exercised the ministry of the word, as well as distributed the alms of the Church.† Indeed the subsequent history shows this to be the case; for Philip and Stephen preached the word, and the former administered the sacrament of baptism.‡ When the men were chosen, we find the apostles praying with them, and for them, that God would bless the labours of those who had been selected to fill this subordinate office in the Church. Nothing did the apostles undertake without prayer, and nothing should the Christian put his hand to, without first, soliciting the blessing of the Lord upon it.

When things were thus put into good order, and all differences were adjusted, the Church greatly increased at Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests—those who were the least likely

* 1 Tim. iii. 8, 10.

† Ignatius says, 'that they were not deacons of meat and drink, but *ministers* of the Church of God.'—Epist. ad Trallianos. Sect. 2. Cotelerius's edition. He also gives a striking testimony in the same place to the existence of the three orders, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. A. D. 107.

‡ Ch. viii. 38.

to embrace Christianity, as they were teachers of the Mosaic law, in opposition to the Gospel—because obedient to the faith. How wonderfully does God work! how astonishing is the power of that grace which turns the hearts of the most opposed and prejudiced to the knowledge of the truth; We should never despair of any, but should pray for the conversion of all about whom we are interested, ever remembering that "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear."

We are now called upon to contemplate the character of Stephen; one who imbibed much of the Saviour's spirit, and who is introduced to our notice as one of the seven first deacons at Jerusalem. We are told that "they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost." He preached with peculiar fervour, and confirmed his doctrines by the miraculous gifts of that Spirit which he possessed; and we are further informed, that when those who disputed with him could not resist the wisdom of his words, they were so enraged against him that they bribed unprincipled men to say that they heard him speak blasphemy. Believers must not be surprised, if, in defence of the truth, their words be wilfully mistaken, and their "good be evil spoken of,"—let them not be discouraged. If the world frowns, yet Jesus regards them with approbation: whatever powers may be against them—whatever trials they may be exposed to, they may exultingly say, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man doeth unto me."

Stephen stood at the bar of his judges, and the eyes of the court were fixed upon him. But what did they behold? Not any signs of guilt or terror in his countenance; no, they "saw his face, as if it had been the face of an angel, majestic and glorious—like the face of Moses, which shone with the reflected light of God, with whom he had been conversing on the mount.* Do we find his accusers so struck by what they saw, as to desist from the prosecution? Alas! such is the blindness and hardness of the human heart, that no external evidence will, of itself, produce any proper religious convictions; so true are these words of Scripture—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Oh; for the faith of Stephen, to be valiant for the sake of truth, amidst all the infidel scoffers of the present day! The servant of the Lord needs such courage; but possessing a cheer-

* Exod. xxxiv. 29, 35.

ful hope, and divine consolation, he may smile in the face of danger and of death; and were persecution itself to be revived in these latter days, such as raged in the early period of the Church, the people of God would be purified, but not destroyed.

NOTE v. 9.—Λιβερτῖνων, "Libertines," probably Jews who having been carried captives to Rome and there freed by their masters, had settled down in that city or in any of the provincial towns which had Roman privileges. See Robinson's Lexicon.

CHAP. VII. 1—34.

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL—REFERS TO THE CALL OF ABRAHAM AND THE LEGATION OF MOSES.

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no not *so much as* to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when *as yet* he had no child. And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat *them* evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so *Abraham* begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac *begat* Jacob; and Jacob *begat* the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt; but God was with him, And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brethren: and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to *him*, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor *the father* of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil-entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all

the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one *of them* suffer wrong, he defended *him*, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sina an angel of the Lord, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw *it*, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold *it*, the voice of the Lord came unto him, *Saying*, I *am* the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet; for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

We here find Stephen at the bar of judgment, before the great council of the Jewish nation. In order that we may understand the scope and bearing of his argument, we must keep in mind what the accusation against him was. It is contained in the 11th, 13th, and 14th, verses of the preceding chapter, where we read, that he was charged with uttering blasphemy against Moses, against the Temple, and the Law. In his defence he pointed to the leading features of the Jewish history; and that he might deliver them from a blind attachment to their law, and to their temple, he reminded them that God had chosen and blessed their ancestors, before the one was given, or the other built. He began at the call of Abraham from his native place in Chaldea, by which call he was set apart by God, to be the father of the Jewish nation, the ancestor of the Messiah, and the trustee of the promises to all the Lord's faithful people. If we would know the nature and effects of justifying faith, we should study the character of the "Father of the Faithful." God, to whom he had been a stranger, called him to leave his country and his friends, and to go forth in dependence upon the word of promise. He, through grace, obeyed the call. He enjoyed the friendship of God, but lived and died a pilgrim; yet in the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection.* What a picture

* See Heb. xi. 8—10.

this, of the Christian's walk by faith! Called of God from his native ignorance, and idolatrous love of the world, he, through grace, obeys, and enjoying communion with his God and Saviour by the way, he still looks forward to the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus, as the time when, with Abraham, he shall enter upon the promised inheritance. The Gospel call has reached you. Do you welcome and embrace it; or do you turn a deaf ear to God's gracious offer of pardon and peace through Jesus?

When Abraham had neither inheritance, nor heir, God declared that he should have both; the one, a land of promise—the other, a child of promise. The child of promise was given him, but the promise of the land of Canaan has not yet been fulfilled. It is true that his posterity obtained a temporary possession of Canaan, and dwelt there under the rule of judges and kings; but they have not yet acknowledged the true Messiah, nor as a nation submitted to his sceptre—hence we look forward to their future restoration, when "the glory of all lands" shall be their's, in a way and sense that have never yet been realized.*

Stephen next referred to Jacob and Joseph, and to that portion of Jewish history with which they were connected; and this part of his subject had particular reference to those before whom he defended himself; for as the children of Israel had dealt with Joseph, so did these rulers deal with the Lord Christ, of whom Joseph was a type. We cannot forbear following up this type, and remarking, that as Joseph, whom his brethren rejected when he came to visit them, was afterwards exalted to be lord over the land of Egypt, and preserved those who had sold him, so the Lord Jesus, who was rejected by the Jews, at his first coming, will yet be exalted upon the earth, and bring deliverance to the tribes of Israel.† We are expecting a reigning Messiah; but none shall reign with him personally, who will not have him now to reign in their hearts spiritually.

Moses is next spoken of by Stephen, but not in that disrespectful manner of which he was accused. He reminded them of two remarkable facts in the early history of Moses. "It came into his heart to visit his brethren," and therefore he left the court of Pharaoh, that he might share in the sorrows of God's people. He there, first of all, smote an Egyptian who was oppressing one of the Israelites, supposing that his brethren would understand, by this significant action, that he was raised

* See Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24, 28. † See Jer. iii. 16, 18.

up to deliver them from Egypt,—"but they understood not. He next endeavoured to reconcile two contending brethren, as a token that he was appointed to be their leader and lawgiver; but of this they were also ignorant, until God brought them out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, and afterwards gave him the law at Sinai. There the angel Jehovah spoke to him out of the bush, and commanded him to take off his shoes, for he stood on holy ground.* Blessed be God, that he has raised up for us the true deliverer, who brings us out of worse than Egyptian bondage—even the chains of Satan. The Lord *then* spoke to his people by a typical mediator, but "in these last days he hath spoken unto us by his Son." May we never thrust him from us, but listen to his voice with all earnestness and faith: so shall we follow him through this wilderness, to the glorious land of promise.

NOTE on v. 6.—The four hundred years, during which the Jewish nation were to be evil-entreated, is best reckoned from the mocking of Isaac by Ishmael, Gen. xxi. 8, 9. from which time to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is exactly four hundred years. See Whitby's Annotations, vol. i. p. 530.

CHAP. VII. 35—60.

STEPHEN CONTINUES HIS DISCOURSE—REFERS TO THE TABERNACLE AND SOLOMON'S TEMPLE—HIS DEATH AND MARTYRDOM.

This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer, by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he that was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers; who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust *him* from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for *as for* this Moses which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven: as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices *by the space of* forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto

* See Exod. ii. 2, 4, 6.

Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven *is* my throne and earth *is* my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord; or what *is* the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things? Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept *it*. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge! And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

THE points of Jewish history to which Stephen referred in the latter part of his defence, were well calculated to suit his purpose of vindicating himself, and criminating his accusers. He continued to speak of Moses in terms of peculiar reverence, and reminded his judges that Moses had predicted the coming of the "great prophet,"* who should resemble himself rather than any subsequent prophet, because he had nearer access to God than other men, and because, like Jesus, he introduced a new dispensation. In other respects Moses, like all types, was far inferior to him who was one with the Father, and yet condescended to dwell with the church in this wilderness of sin. He also intimates, that as their forefathers rejected their lawgiver, so they rejected the Lord Jesus. He thus intended to awaken a sense of guilt for their crucifying the Lord Jesus, and he points out the awful punishment with which God would visit them for this crime, by recalling to their memory the Babylonish captivity. If they had reason to be warned by a former captivity of seventy years, how much more reason have we to be warned, when we reflect, that for their sin of rejecting Christ, they have, for nearly one thousand eight hundred years, been excluded from the favour of God, and "sifted among the nations!" How little

* Deut. xviii. 15, 18.

do the world consider their danger, in refusing obedience to the Gospel of Christ! They live as if it were a matter of indifference whether they were religious or not, and it is much to be doubted whether it would make any alteration in their hopes or fears, if it could be proved that Jesus Christ never offered an atonement for sinners; and yet such persons call themselves Christians!

The substance of Stephen's argument in the latter verses of this chapter is as follows: that after the giving of the law by Moses, the Israelites had worshipped God, not in Canaan, nor at Jerusalem, but in the wilderness; and not at a stately temple, but at a moveable tabernacle,*—that this tabernacle had been carried by their fathers into Canaan, under the leading of Jesus, or Joshua, and was the residence of God's presence for several hundred years—that David, at length, spoke of building a temple, but was prohibited, that honour being reserved for his *peaceable* son, Solomon. Here let us remark, that David was a type of Jesus only in his suffering and warlike state; but that Solomon (as his name intimated) represented him in the peace, and splendour, and majesty of his millennial kingdom. *Then* will commence the exaltation of Jesus—the reign of righteousness and universal peace; so that we are yet to look forward to the accomplishment of those things by Jesus, in person, which the splendid and triumphant reign of Solomon typified.

But to proceed with Stephen's argument. He showed that when Solomon had finished the building of the temple, he was far from considering it a fit habitation for the Deity, whose throne was heaven, and his footstool, earth; and that if Solomon had so mean an opinion of the costly † temple which he built, the Jews ought not to think so much of the one then standing, which was greatly inferior to it in beauty.‡ Here Stephen broke off his argument, being warned, as we may conjecture, by the looks of his judges, that he would not be allowed to speak much longer. He, therefore, hastened to make a direct application to them of what he had said, and charged them with the murder of Jesus. At this they were enraged, even to madness, and the glorious vision with which Stephen was favoured, and which he made known to them, only served to exasperate them still more, for they then proceeded to stone him.

Stephen was the first in the ranks of the "noble army of the

* See Exod. xl. 1, 5.

* See 1 Kings chap. viii. 27. † See Ezra iii. 12.

martyrs," since the Saviour's ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit. Great was the honour of such a post, and lovely the fruit in this devoted servant of God at such a trying hour, especially if we compare him with his enraged enemies. He displayed the utmost peace of mind, and they the wildest fury: he, the most forgiving spirit, and they, the most revengeful. He knew, before, that Jesus was at the right hand of God, but having *seen* him there, his mind was fortified, and death was stripped of its terrors. To Christ, therefore, he addressed himself in prayer, and commended his soul into his Saviour's hands, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." This was as solemn an act of worship as he could offer, for it was precisely the same that Christ himself had offered to his Father, with his dying breath, when he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Yet this act of worship was paid by Stephen, to Christ, at the very time when he beheld the Father's glory, and at the very time that he was full of the Holy Ghost. How evident is it, from hence, that Christ is God, equal with the Father; and how evident is it, that a *well-founded* hope of dwelling with him hereafter, will disarm death of its sting, and support the soul under the most cruel sufferings. This is the faith which we should cultivate. It looks above this receding world, and fixes its gaze on the glories of Jesus. It brings the eternal world so close to us, that every temporal sorrow or joy is counted as nothing worth. If we can only commend our departing souls into the hands of Jesus, when we come to that solemn hour, we shall be carried safely through all the terrors of death, and be numbered among the happy spirits who are now enjoying the presence of a reconciled Father—without sin and without alloy.

CHAP. VIII. 1—25.

PHILIP PREACHES THE GOSPEL IN SAMARIA—MANY RECEIVE THE TRUTH—SIMON MAGUS BAPTIZED—HIS SIN AND HYPOCRISY.

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed *them* to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached

Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them;* and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money. Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

In the last chapter we find mention made of a young man, whose name was Saul, who seemed to take an active part in the death of Stephen, as we learn that the witnesses laid down their clothes at his feet. We again hear his name mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, as a most fierce persecutor of the Christian Church. And here we must remark the overruling providence of God. This persecution, which was designed to extirpate the Church, was, by the scattering of the disciples, made an occasion of its enlargement, for the disciples went every where, preaching the Gospel. Thus we often see how the Lord brings good out of evil, and light out of darkness. This should encourage the true followers of Christ to trust, and not to be afraid; for, however dark and gloomy their way may be, the Lord, in a peculiar manner, watches over his own, and will, assuredly, make all things work together for their good.

Amongst the dispersed who went to one of the cities of Samaria,

was Philip, the deacon. The doctrine that he preached was "Christ." A volume is contained in that simple expression—preaching Christ. The effect of Philip's preaching is noted—"there was great joy in that city." And why? Because "the people, with one accord, gave "heed to the things that were spoken." Blessed is that city, or that family, who, having the Gospel freely preached to them, thankfully receive the same. The reception of this message fills men with solid joy, which outlives all earthly happiness; whereas the despiser or neglecter of the Gospel shall be filled with shame and sorrow.

But we now turn to a far different picture. We read of a man named Simon, a conjurer, or sorcerer, (for so the word "Magus" signifies,) who gave out that himself was some great one, so that many in Samaria followed him: for, by his magical arts, he bewitched the minds of the people. But when they heard Philip preach, and saw his miracles, they quickly forsook Simon. Thus will it ever be; when the Gospel reaches the heart of an individual, he will at once forsake those evil practices in which he formerly took delight. "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature;* old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."* We next hear that Simon himself was baptized, and we have no reason to think that Philip did amiss in baptizing him, though his faith and repentance were far from genuine; but Philip did not know this; he was not given the power to see into his heart. The Lord alone knew it. Thus is it with numbers, who are professors of Christianity,—having been baptized in the name of Christ, they should be admitted into all the privileges of the Christian religion, until they give open and decided evidence of an unholy state. Yet God, who searches the heart, knows how many bear the name of Christ, without being united to him by faith. May he, in mercy, be pleased to awaken those who are still dead in trespasses and sins, and give them grace to know themselves, and to know Christ as their Almighty Saviour.

When the news came to Jerusalem, that the Samaritans had received the word, the two apostles, Peter and John, were sent thither to strengthen and assist Philip. The Holy Ghost had not yet fallen upon any at Samaria, as on the day of Pentecost, bestowing upon them extraordinary gifts, though they must have experienced its sanctifying influence upon their souls, when they rejoiced at the preaching of Philip. We are told that the apos-

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

tles prayed for them, and then the miraculous gifts were given to that church, in proof that the Spirit was poured out from on high, and that the apostles were commissioned to order the new dispensation. Simon, whose baptism and Christian profession we have already heard of, seeing that the Holy Ghost was received by the laying on of the apostles' hands, impiously proposed to purchase the same power with a sum of money. Peter immediately rejected his offer with disdain, at the same time reproving his hypocrisy, and telling him plainly that he had neither part nor lot in the matter, because, notwithstanding all his professions, "his heart was not right in the sight of God." It is the great aim of Scripture to show us the necessity of a change of heart. All the mere outward forms of religion are nothing without this. "Make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good," says our Lord. Our hearts must be "right in the sight of God," and then our lives will become holy; and nothing can make our hearts right but the regenerating influence of God's Holy Spirit. Let each of us now put this solemn question to ourselves—is my heart right with God? Has it been changed and sanctified? If this be the case, we have, indeed, received the Spirit of God, and our hearts (through his teaching) *are* right in his sight; but let us beware how we deceive ourselves upon a point of so much importance; for we see that though Simon professed to believe, and was baptized, yet the apostle declares to him that he had *no* part in the matter, and that he was in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." The character here given of Simon is really the character of all unconverted people. May we think and consider, before it be too late, of the awful state of those who die unconverted, and are for ever separated from God, having no part in Christ's salvation! Peter, after having thus sharply rebuked Simon, endeavoured to lead him to repentance and prayer; and the wretched man seemed, in some degree, to be awakened by it, although we have no intimation of his becoming a sincere penitent and real believer. What a solemn warning is here given to us! May we all be led to profit by it, and may we be led to seek and obtain that inward change of heart, by the Holy Spirit, without which all outward form is perfectly useless.

NOTE on v. 14—17.—This passage is justly cited in proof of confirmation, as held by the Church of England—not a sacrament, but an ordinance for an increased measure of the Holy Spirit's presence. With the exception of what is miraculous, the chief features are the same.

CHAP. VIII. 26—40.

PHILIP GOES TO GAZA—MEETS THE EUNUCH, AND EXPOUNDS THE SCRIPTURES TO HIM—THE EUNUCH IS BAPTIZED, AND REJOICETH.

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and, sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.

THIS portion of Scripture is full of important lessons. From it we learn how valuable even one soul is in the sight of God—how easily he finds instruments to effect his purposes of mercy, and how readily he meets and blesses the anxious inquirer, seeking for the way of peace.

We read of a certain person who was an Ethiopian, a man of great authority—the treasurer to the queen of the Ethiopians. He had been at Jerusalem to worship, by which we learn that he was a convert to the Jewish faith.* But as yet he seemed igno-

* Some think that he was an Egyptian Jew, who had been carried into Ethiopia when young. (See Bloomfield's Lectures.) Candace, queen of the Ethiopians is mentioned by Strabo, as a women of great spirit. Arrian says that Gaza is the last town before entering the desert between Phœnicia and Egypt, (lib. ii. cap. 26.) hence ερημος rather agrees with οδος (the way) than Gaza—it was a desolate region. See Valpy.

rant of the glorious things shadowed forth in the Jewish ritual, nor did he enter with any comfort into the predictions of the prophets. Observe, now, the watchful providence of God towards him! Had he returned home, he must have been placed out of the reach of human instruction, as he was going to an idolatrous country. But the Lord gave special instruction to Philip, to go and meet him on his way. According to *our* weak judgments, Philip might have been more useful in the populous towns of Samaria; and had Philip consulted his own indulgence, he might have preferred remaining in Samaria, to the inconvenience of a journey to a "desert" place. But he instantly obeyed, and the result proved how much superior God's plans are to our's—how much he will do for the conversion of a single soul, and how incumbent it is on ministers of the gospel to follow the leadings of providence, without hesitation or delay.

Philip was further directed to the objects of God's love. He met this treasurer and man of authority; and how did he find him occupied? In the study of God's word! He was reading as he travelled in his chariot. How many of us would be *ashamed* to take out our Bibles upon a journey, because such an occupation, at such a time, might bring down upon us the world's ridicule. Christians are alike at all periods of the world, and all who love the Lord Jesus will improve that time which others waste, to their own benefit, or that of those around them. Say not that you have no time to read the Bible; but if you neglect it, confess rather the real truth—that you have no pleasure in reading the Bible; for if it gave you pleasure—if you had a willing mind—you would surely find the time. Philip addressed the treasurer, and though he appeared on foot, and, perhaps, in an humble garb, such as befitted his employment, yet he did not, on that account, despise him; but so eager was he for instruction, that he invited him up into his chariot. The part of Scripture which he read, was contained in that important chapter, the fifty-third of Isaiah, but, like many others, he read without knowing its meaning. Yet, all diligent enquirers should be encouraged from his history, to trust that the Lord will, in some way or other, supply the instruction which they seek for. Philip explained the passage, and "preached to him Jesus." This was his text and sermon in the city of Samaria, (v. 5) and the same was his text and sermon in the desert of Judea. He found enough in this one subject for all occasions. Oh! that all modern preachers would do the same. Philip showed that Jesus was the "Lamb of God" of whom Isaiah spoke;

and so comprehensive and clear was his interpretation, and so effectually did the Lord bring it home to the heart of the Ethiopian treasurer, that he begged to receive baptism, as an introduction to the Christian Church, which, upon his sound confession of faith, Philip administered to him, and then was parted from him, while the happy disciple of Jesus "went on his way rejoicing."

And surely all who believe in the same Jesus shall be partakers of the same joy. *They* have cause for gladness, whose chains of darkness have been broken, and whose eyes have been enlightened to see the Saviour by faith. A sense of God's pardoning love is shed abroad in their hearts, and they have the "spirit of adoption, whereby they can say, "Abba, Father." They are brought into a new world; "old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." They have new views and new desires, such as they never before had the slightest idea of. The Gospel which you hear is the same which Philip preached. The Saviour of whom he spoke, is the same now as he was then, and is able to communicate to you the same joy that he did to the person whom we read of. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and you, too, shall be enabled to "go on your way rejoicing."

NOTE.—Jerome styles this Eunuch "the Apostle of the Ethiopians" and the traditions of that country say that he converted the Queen to the faith—with St. Matthew's help expelled idolatry from that country—and afterwards preached the gospel in Arabia, Persia, and Judea, and at last died as a Martyr in the Island of Taprobana, now called Ceylon.—See Cave's lives of the Fathers, p. 21.

CHAP. IX. 1—22.

THE HISTORY OF SAUL'S CONVERSION.

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless,

hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I *am here*, Lord. And the Lord *said* unto him. Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth; And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

We have already heard that Saul of Tarsus was a fierce persecutor of the Church of Christ. He had been engaged in the martyrdom of Stephen, and afterwards, like a beast of prey, had spread havoc among the defenceless disciples. His persecuting zeal had now mounted to such an height, that it is said "he breathed out threatenings and slaughter;" and not content with what he could do at Jerusalem, was in the act of going to Damascus, to vent his rage upon the Christians, when he was arrested in his mad career—not by a warrant for condemnation, as we might expect—but by a voice of love from that Jesus against whom he fought. He had nearly reached the city of Damascus, exulting in his bloody intentions, when lo! a gleam of glory which eclipsed the noon-day sun, struck him to the ground, and a voice addressed him, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" This was the voice of Jesus. But whom had Saul been persecuting? The Christians: yet Jesus says, why persecutest thou *me?* See what an intimate union exists between Christ and his people, that he is sensitive of every insult offered to them. He has said of his

people Israel, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye;"* and so says he of all his believing people. How vain are all the efforts of man or Satan against his true followers. They may oppose, and sometimes harass them, but they cannot destroy them. Christ sees in them his own image, and he will not allow any thing to efface it.

The history of Saul's conversion will serve us in many ways. It furnishes us with a ready answer to the infidel opposers of Christianity. Here was a most zealous supporter of the Jewish faith, with every faculty of mind and body arrayed in hostility to the doctrines of the Gospel. And yet, behold him, in a moment, changed to embrace those views which he so zealously laboured to destroy. Whence was this change, but by miracle? If so, either Satan, or God, was the author of it. If Satan, then he was acting against his own interest, for out of a *murderous* persecutor, he became a most holy character. If it was God, Christianity, which Saul embraced, must be true, for God directed him to embrace it.

We learn, also, how foolish is the idea, that if a man be only *sincere*, it matters not what religion he is of—God will surely accept him. Was ever man more sincere than Saul? † if sincerity could save him, might he not as well have remained a zealous persecuting Jew, as become a Christian? But we see from Saul's case, that sincerity in a false profession, will never be an excuse for a neglect of the Gospel of Christ.

We chiefly learn from this narrative, the nature of that conversion which we must *all* be partakers of. It is as necessary for us, as it ever was for Saul; though we are Christians already in name, we are not living members of Christ's spiritual Church, till we have been "born again" of the Spirit of God. 'Tis true we must separate from Saul's conversion every thing that was miraculous, when thinking of our own case; but that which formed the essential part of his conversion, we must expect, and must experience, too, if ever we would be numbered with the saints of God. He afterwards comments on his own conversion—and declares, that he was set forth as a *pattern* of God's free grace to sinners—the chief of whom Jesus Christ came to save.‡ Even in the more extraordinary circumstances of his conversion, we may trace an illustration of God's dealings to an heaven-born soul;—thus for three days and nights he continued blind; and, at the expiration of that time, "there fell from his

* Zech. ii. 8. † See Phil. iii. 4, 5, 6. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

eyes, as it had been scales." This was, doubtless, intended to represent the blindness of our state by nature, and the light into which we are brought by grace. Saul obtained a *renewed will.* —Hitherto he had been following his *own* will, but when he saw Jesus, he instantly said—"Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?" Here is the crown and summit of true conversion. We may have, to a great degree, an enlightened mind, and yet retain an unsanctified heart: we may have a wounded spirit, and yet hold fast our iniquities; but if our *will* be changed, then it is certain that we have received the grace of God in truth. Has *your* will been changed? Are you most anxious to please yourself, or to please God? Do not judge by a single answer to this question, but let the general bent of your affections, and the tenor of your *life* decide the point. Like Saul, too, you must obtain a *praying spirit.* He had been a strict Pharisee, and had, doubtless, *repeated many* prayers from his earliest childhood; yet it was not till after his conversion that it could be said—"behold! he prayeth." This is indeed a sure mark of a soul quickened by the Spirit: and Christ, our great advocate, hears with attention every breathing after God, every cry of the contrite sinner.

We may remark of Ananias' objection, how differently the Lord judgeth from man. It was natural for this servant of God to be fearful and suspicious of a noted persecutor. But "the Lord knoweth them that are his:" Saul was "a chosen vessel," and soon to be an honoured instrument, and therefore Ananias was commanded to receive this new convert to the faith. Saul's conduct soon testified to the reality of the great change effected in him by the Spirit of God. We learn that he immediately began to "preach that faith which he once laboured to destroy." Neither fear nor shame operated to prevent him; but with a heart full of love and gratitude, he took every opportunity of advancing his Saviour's cause, and thought it an honour to suffer shame for his sake. Let those of us who, like Saul, have been adopted into the Lord's family, strive to overcome those ungrateful feelings of fear and shame, by which Satan tempts us to compromise the Saviour's interest for the world's favour. We should remember, that "we are no longer our own—that we are bought with a price," and that Jesus, having paid the purchase, has an undoubted right to our undivided service.

NOTE.—Augustine supposes that St. Paul's conversion was a blessed fruit of Stephen's last prayer, Nam si sanctus Stephanus non sic orasset, ecclesia Paulum non haberet.

CHAP. IX. 23—43.

PAUL PERSECUTED AT DAMASCUS—FLIES TO ARABIA—HE VISITS JERUSALEM, AND JOINS THE DISCIPLES—THE CHURCHES ARE EDIFIED—DORCAS RAISED UP.

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. *Which* when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all *quarters*, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid *her* in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring *him* that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning *him* to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her *his* hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

THE Lord had said to Ananias, respecting Saul, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (v. 16.) And so the event soon proved; for his life was in such danger from the anger of the Jews, that the disciples were

obliged to use a stratagem to preserve it. Ever since the days of Cain, the ungodly have persecuted the people of the Lord; * and especially their opposition is excited, when one who was their brother in iniquity, is changed by the grace of God. His holiness then becomes a tacit rebuke to their sin, and, hence, their hatred. But if you are thus suffering in the Lord's service, rather rejoice that the ungodly have had cause to dislike you, because not ranked amongst them as an enemy of Jesus.

It would, at first sight, appear as if Saul had immediately gone up to Jerusalem, upon leaving Damascus; but we learn from one of his epistles that he spent three years in Arabia before he went to Jerusalem.† Upon his arrival there, his first desire was to join himself to the disciples of Christ. What a change had been wrought in him since he last was in that city! *Then* he persecuted the Christians even to death—*now* he longs to enjoy their society. The disciples at first avoided his society, not feeling sure that from a bloody persecutor he was become a humble and devoted follower of Jesus of Nazareth. All this happens in our own day. We have seen persecutors, mercifully changed by the grace of God, afterwards court the friendship of those whom they once so much disliked. We have witnessed, too, the same (perhaps over-prudent) reserve with which their first professions have been received: but we have afterwards seen the joy which their union with the brethren excited—the brotherly love in which they lived—and have heard grateful songs of praise afterwards ascend to heaven, from those who once stood related as persecutors and persecuted. It is God's converting grace which can alone produce these wonders. "He maketh men to be of one mind in an house." What encouragement should the case of Saul afford you, who have any longing to receive the same grace as was bestowed upon him. No previous *merit* entitled him to distinguishing favour. We can scarcely conceive a case more desperate than that of Saul, when "breathing out threatenings" against the saints of God. Yet to him was mercy vouchsafed. Let the weary and heavy-laden sinner take courage, and look up to the Lord in fervent prayer, through Jesus; for the blood of Christ is as effectual to cleanse from sin as it ever was, and its virtue can still be extended to the chief of sinners. Who then shall, hereafter, think himself enslaved beyond a possibility of redemption? Is not that grace which wrought effectually in Saul sufficient for you? Can any

* 1 John iii. 12. † Gal. i. 17, 18.

thing be too hard for the Lord? Let not any, therefore, despond, under the idea that his corruptions are too deep and inveterate to be rooted up; for that same Jesus is yet possessed of all power in heaven and earth, and is still "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

The Lord appoints both the seasons of sorrow and of comfort to his people. We have lately seen the church under bitter persecution, and believers scattered every where, preaching the word; but now the Lord vouchsafes *rest* to them for a season. It is delightful to mark the progress of the Gospel after these trying times. The churches were multiplied—the word of God was glorified, by the conversion of multitudes—all Satan's wiles were defeated, and even overruled for good. The churches were edified and established; outward trials drove them more to the true source of strength; the Holy Ghost guided and comforted them, and their spirituality increased as much as their number.

We read of two miracles performed by Peter: one upon a man named Eneas, whom he raised to health, after eight years' confinement from the palsy: the other upon a pious woman named Dorcas, whom he raised to life from the dead. Her friends hearing that Peter was near, sent, and urged him to come without delay. Dorcas left behind her a goodly record—she had been "full of good works and alms-deeds,"—such, no doubt, as sprang from a lively faith in the Lord Jesus, and proved to men that she was a willing and devoted disciple of the Lord. The coats and garments which she made, were shown by the widows to Peter, as a token of her love for the poorer brethren. We should be ashamed of our religion, if it does not make us really *useful* members of the church—all can do something—all can minister in some way to Christ's members. Blessed are those who feel it their greatest joy to glorify their Master in heaven, by doing good to the souls and bodies of the children of sorrow.

CHAP. X. 1—24.

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS—HIS PREVIOUS STATE—THE GENTILE DISPENSATION COMMENCES.

There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian *band, A* devout *man,* and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of

God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for *one* Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually: And when he had declared all *these* things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what *is* the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged *them*. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after, they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

Up to the period of the Church's history at which we have arrived, we find that the apostles did not administer baptism to, or admit into their Christian communion, any but those who belonged to the Jewish nation. We have now arrived at a remarkable period of that history, when God threw down the middle wall of partition which had existed between Jew and Gentile,* and admitted the latter to all the privileges of the former. The person selected as the first-fruits of the Gentile Church, was Cornelius. He was an officer in that part of the Roman army which was then stationed in Judea. He is repre-

* Eph. ii. 14.

sented as a man of excellent moral character, and one too, who abounded in the fruits of righteousness.

Much erroneous doctrine has been extracted from this narrative, by persons whose unhumbled minds will not stoop in obedience to the plain word of God. Some draw from it the conclusion, that Cornelius, being a heathen, and a moral character, his natural religion, as they call it, was sufficient to produce these good effects, without the need of divine revelation. Others ground upon it the monstrous error, that his alms-deeds and prayers were the moving cause of God's favour to him; thereby saying, that he was saved *by his works*, without any faith in the Lord Jesus, contrary to the express declaration of Scripture.* The true state of the case seems to be this. Cornelius, we are told, (verse 1.) was quartered in Cesarea, a town in Galilee, built by Herod, in honour of Cæsar Augustus—it was then a sea-port of great renown, about sixty miles from Jerusalem—it is now in utter ruin. Cornelius, therefore, living among the Jews, might have derived his knowledge of the true God from them, and been enlightened to the same degree that a pious Jew would have been, previous to the birth of Christ; or he might have heard Jesus for himself—as the chapter states that the Gospel was preached through *all* Judea, beginning from Galilee.† The works, therefore, which he performed, were the fruits of that instruction. God must, in every case, be the author of whatever is good in man; and God having providentially led him to that place where he was blessed with the light of truth, now proceeded to perfect that work, by leading him to higher degrees of knowledge, and to a public profession of his faith. How wonderfully does God act, whilst drawing a soul towards himself. Many events which the individual might blindly call chance, will afterwards appear to him as so many links in the chain of Providence. What is said of his dealings towards Israel, may be said of each of his people. "He brings the blind by a way that they know not; he leads them in paths that they have not known; he makes darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: *these things will he do unto them, and not forsake them.*" ‡ Thus was Cornelius led, and when the Lord would instruct him further, he directed him, by a vision, to send for Peter. Observe, that the Lord constantly works by means. Had he pleased, he might have revealed to Cornelius the information he wished,

* 2 Tim. i. 9. † See v. 36 and 37. ‡ Isaiah xlii. 16.

but he chose to use the instrumentality of his minister. We see, then, that it was God, speaking to Cornelius by Peter; and had Cornelius rejected what he said, it would have been considered as an insult to the Lord. Beware how you think lightly of what a faithful minister of the Gospel says to you. It is nothing to despise *his* words, but it is awful madness to disregard what he declares to you from the word of God.

The minds of the apostles were so swayed by Jewish prejudice, that although Jesus had directed them to "go and baptize *all nations*," yet did the Lord deem it necessary to use some extraordinary method, in order to overcome it, and to reconcile Peter to receive Cornelius, the Gentile, into the Christian communion. The law which weighed with Peter, was that which forbade the Jews to have intercourse with the heathen around him. But in order to show him that the same Lord who made the law, could dispense with it when he pleased, he caused him to see a vision, in which was represented a great variety of birds, and beasts, and creeping things, let down from heaven in a vast sheet. Many of these animals were such as the Jewish law forbade to be eaten, and were, in consequence, called "unclean." * Yet the Lord directed Peter, who was then in an hungry state, to kill and eat; and upon Peter's refusal, it was added, "what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was God's voice to Peter, telling him, that as the law respecting clean and unclean animals was now abolished, so the law which forbade him holding communion with the Gentiles, was likewise out of force; thus was Peter prepared to comply with the wish of Cornelius, and to accompany his messenger, who arrived just after Peter had seen the vision. From that day to the present, the Gospel has been preached to the Gentiles—the Lord in righteous judgment having taken it from the Jews, on account of their unbelief. We are now living in all the privileges of the Gentile dispensation, and it behoves us to bring forth the fruit expected by the Lord of the vineyard, "otherwise we shall be cut off." We have reason indeed to fear, that the unfaithfulness of the Gentile Churches will bring down God's heavy judgment upon them, and finally, transfer the candlestick from them to the long outcast Jews.† May the words of Jesus reach the hearts of all who read these pages; "YET A LITTLE WHILE IS THE LIGHT WITH YOU: WALK WHILE YE HAVE THE LIGHT, LEST DARKNESS COME UPON YOU."

* Lev. xi. 4, 8.

† See Rom. xi. 21, 23.

CHAP. X. 25—48.

PETER GOES TO CORNELIUS—HE PREACHES THE GOSPEL TO HIM AND HIS FRIENDS—THE BLESSED EFFECTS.

And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped *him*. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I *unto you* without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of *one* Simon a tanner, by the sea-side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

WE here learn what occurred after Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius. Having been desirous of instruction, he felt

also anxious about the souls of "his kinsmen and near friends;" and, therefore, had them assembled, to share, with him, the benefit of Peter's exhortation. All who are under the influence of religion, must not only be anxious about, but labour for, the spiritual welfare of their friends and relatives. Where the souls of relatives are not cared for, it is a sure mark of deadness to God. Much of this chapter is a repetition of what went before, as Cornelius recited to Peter the particulars of his vision. We must remark, however, the decided manner in which Peter rejected the homage which Cornelius offered him. He had bowed at his feet to worship; but the truly humble Apostle forbade him, and raised him up, saying, "I myself also am a man." How unlike to Peter are those who call themselves his successors, and who present their feet to be kissed by their adoring disciples.

Mark the language of Cornelius at the close of his recital. "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." What a happy thing would it be, if every minister of the Gospel could feel sure of meeting his congregation in such a spirit as this; they would then listen to him, not as authorized to declare his own opinions, but to deliver from the Scriptures those things which are commanded him by God. Alas! how different are the majority of congregations. How few among the multitudes who throng the house of God, can adopt these words sincerely! How many (if they spoke the truth) must rather say, "we are here present, to display our persons, or our dresses; we are here present to keep up an appearance of religion: we would avoid the service if we could, and are glad when it is over." And yet such call themselves Christians, and would be highly offended if it were said that they were not religious. Oh! what fearful surprise shall seize them, when death shall break their fatal delusion. May the Lord Jesus reveal to all such a true knowledge of their state, and apply the remedy before they pass from time to eternity.

Peter addressed this interesting congregation, and, as usual, made CHRIST the subject of his preaching. He dwelt upon the baptism of John—the anointing of Jesus as the great prophet—his death on the cross—his glorious resurrection, and his second coming to judge the world—and he summed up all by proclaiming pardon in the Redeemer's blood to these Gentiles, as he had done before to the Jews. He was convinced that God would confine no longer the light of revelation to one nation, but that

now "in every nation, all that feared God and worked righteousness, would be accepted with him." The Lord was pleased to accompany his servant's words by a sensible token of divine approval, and bestowed upon the congregation the miraculous gifts of his Holy Spirit. This was the more remarkable, because the like favour had not, before, been given to the Gentiles; but Peter and his companions were now convinced that the Gentile dispensation had commenced, of which this favoured little band were the first fruits, and that no distinction was afterwards to be made between Jews and Gentiles, with regard to the preaching of the Gospel, and admission to Christian privileges.

This narrative of Cornelius should be an encouragement to all who are seeking after farther light and knowledge in spiritual matters. Let us attend to the word of God, with the same disposition as he and his family did, and God will never suffer us to "perish for lack of knowledge." He will either, by his providence, send us an instructor for the farther illumination of our minds, or by his Spirit, will guide us into all truth, by the instrumentality of his written word. He never said to any, "seek ye me in vain."

CHAP. XI.

PETER EXPLAINS HIS MISSION TO THE GENTILES—BARNABAS SENT TO ANTIOCH—THE DISCIPLES THERE ARE FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS.

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed *the matter* from the beginning, and expounded *it* by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to

Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

We learn from this chapter, how improper is all rash and hasty judgment, and how blessed is that meek and gentle spirit of the Christian, which enables him to give a calm explanation of his conduct, to those who have put upon it an improper construction. The news of what occurred at Cæsarea, soon travelled to Jerusalem, and on Peter's arrival there, he was reproved by the other apostles for that act which they, without full information, condemned. Peter knew who had directed him to go to Cæsarea, and he was conscious that the Lord designed to gather the Gentiles into the church, and to make them fellow-heirs with the Jewish converts, and "partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel." * This, no doubt, fortified his mind, and enabled him to bear reproach, and to answer with mildness. The people of God, when employed by him, may calculate upon the world's frown, and even their brethren in Christ may cause them sorrow,

* Eph. iii. 6.

when they oppose their proceedings, without inquiring into their motives. To show displeasure, when we know ourselves to be right, is not the way to correct those that are wrong. Peter, with brotherly affection, recited the whole occurrence, and submitted to their calmer judgment, that since the Holy Ghost had been given to these Gentiles, he could not withstand God, and refuse to minister to them. This recital had the desired effect —their prejudices were removed—and with one consent, they "glorified God, who had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life." How deeply are we interested in this extension of God's mercy to the nations of the world, and how earnestly should we inquire, have we reaped the fruit? has God given to us individually the grace of real and godly repentance?

We are called on to notice how the Lord further overruled the persecution of Stephen, and the consequent dispersion of the disciples, to the greater benefit of his church. More than three years had elapsed since they were obliged to leave Jerusalem, and though we are not to suppose that they all acted as appointed ministers of the Gospel, yet did they act, as every Christian must act, wherever he goes; they endeavoured to make others acquainted with the glad tidings of the Gospel, *speaking* of it (as the original implies) wherever they could do so. The Lord blessed their efforts, and their exertions have been left on record for the encouragement of others; who, though not authorised to proclaim the truth by public preaching, have yet a wide sphere of private labour, in which they can usefully exercise their talents, and employ their time. The apostle Barnabas was sent to assist these zealous friends of the Gospel, at Antioch, and he "exhorted them with purpose of heart, to cleave unto the Lord." What important advice was this! To see men apparently impressed by religion, is a source of very exalted joy; still, however, that joy is by no means unmixed. In viewing a tree full of blossoms, we almost irresistibly contemplate the dangers to which they are exposed, and the probability there is, that many of them will never come to maturity. Such must have been the feeling of Barnabas, when, after seeing so much promise of fruit among the disciples at Antioch, and knowing how diligent Satan would be to blight the tender buds of grace, he "exhorted them with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord." May you profit by his advice; you especially, who are young in the faith, should attend to this word of exhortation. Besides the proneness of your hearts to sin, and the evil suggestions which Satan puts into your hearts, you have a formidable enemy in *the world*. Its frowns and

smiles are both dangerous. The anger and persecution of worldly friends and relations, is difficult to be borne. But still more dangerous, would we say, are the flattering caresses of those who would entice you from your haven of safety, and launch you once more upon the boisterous waves of the world. Your only safety against all these dangers, is to cleave to the Lord as your strength and deliverer, but it must be with *full purpose* of heart—all half service is an insult to God and a grievous wound to the soul.* Let us pray to be like Barnabas —"full of the Holy Ghost and of faith;" and then like him we shall enjoy spirituality of mind, and be fitted for usefulness in the Church.

The Church at Antioch was now also blessed with the labours of Saul, who remained there with Barnabas for a whole year. It was at Antioch, we are told, that the disciples were first called Christians; and it is evident from the original expression, that this name was given by divine appointment, for the same Greek word is used here as by St. Matthew, concerning the wise men sent to Christ, and which is properly rendered—"warned of God."† We have reason to believe that Barnabas and Saul were directed by God to call his people *Christians,* from the name of their blessed master—Christ—the anointed one. They are also endued with this excellent gift of the Spirit, being anointed or set apart for God's service by the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.‡ Honourable and glorious title! Would to God we valued it more highly, and set forth its meaning by walking in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ. But how shamefully has the name been abused! We see some, who ridicule vital religion—others, who use it for decency's sake, but dislike it—and not a few, who are infidels at heart, but have not courage to avow it, all calling themselves Christians. What an awful idea is it to think how few there are who love and obey Christ, out of the multitudes of professing worshippers, and to think how few grains of sterling corn shall be found, when Christ shall sift the nations of Christendom, and what piles of unprofitable chaff shall be committed to the flames! *You* are called a Christian—Examine the evidences upon which you think yourself entitled to that name. Have you received the unction of the Holy Spirit? Has it changed your life, and sanctified your heart?

* See Hos. x. 1, 2.

† Matt. ii. 12. χρηματίζω—is sometimes rendered "to call" as Rom. vii. 3. but generally "to warn from God." See Luke ii. 26. Heb. viii. 5; xi. 7.

‡ 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.

If so, you *are* a Christian; but if not, the name which you have borne, will be worse than useless.

NOTE 1, on v. 26.—Antioch was favoured in having Ignatius as its first Bishop. It is described as "that most ancient and truly Apostolic Church of Antioch in which the honourable name of Christian did first commence."—See Theodoret's History, l. v. c. 9.

NOTE 2, on v. 28.—Josephus gives a very exact account of the famine here referred to, and of the sufferings that followed.—See Antiq. lib. xx. c. 11. Sec. 5.

CHAP. XII.

HEROD PUTS JAMES TO DEATH—PETER IMPRISONED, BUT MIRACULOUSLY DELIVERED—GOD'S ANSWER TO PRAYER—THE DEATH OF HEROD.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quarternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small

stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judæa to Cæsarea, and *there* abode. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is* the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

THE Church of Christ was not long allowed to enjoy that calm which followed after the storm of Saul's persecution had subsided. Satan found that Herod was a willing instrument to carry on his murderous work, and he accordingly made use of him. This was Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, and father of the Agrippa before whom Paul made his defence.* By the Emperor Caligula, he was made king of Trachonitis, and afterwards by Claudius, king of Judea and Samaria. To please the Jews, his subjects, he had stretched out the hand of wrath, and killed the apostle James, and thus was our Lord's prophecy of drinking the same cup with him fulfilled.† Peter was next marked as the victim of their cruel persecution. But though the Lord, for wise purposes, allowed the death of James, he miraculously prevented the death of Peter, and thereby proved that, in whatever circumstances his people may be, they may safely commit their cause into his hands.

To all human appearance, nothing could be more hopeless, than Peter's deliverance. He was in prison, closely guarded by four quarternions of soldiers—a quarternion is a detachment of four men—the usual number of a Roman night-watch, which was relieved every three hours; the whole number that watched him during the night was sixteen, and to make more sure of their prisoner, he was chained to two, whilst two others stood at the door. He had no friends to intercede for him; this also was his last night; on the morrow he was to be brought forth for public execution. But, "what is impossible with man is possible with God." Mark the *means* of his deliverance. From human interference there was no hope; but the disciples did not

* See Acts xxv. 13. † See Matt. xx. 23.

despair. They had recourse to prayer, and continued all night in unceasing supplication. What foolish means would these appear, to those who knew how strongly Peter was guarded, and how determinately both Herod and the Jews were bent upon his death; but as God is omnipotent, prayer, which interests God for us, may be called omnipotent also; "it moves the hand that moves the world." Oh! that we, as individuals, as a church, and as a nation, did but duly appreciate the power of prayer! How safe should we be from all enemies, and how happy under the protection of our God.

See, now, the *manner* in which Peter was delivered. God heard the disciples' prayers, and sent his angel to effect his deliverance. How speedily was the work done! The chains fell from his hands; the keepers and soldiers were overpowered, so that they were either insensible of what was passing, or could make no resistance; and the iron gate that led into the city, opened to him of its own accord. So surprising was this deliverance, that Peter himself could scarcely conceive it to be true, but thought it was all passing in a mere vision before him. It is thus we see exemplified the words of the Psalmist: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them." * Of the ministration of angels we have many examples in this book,† and without falling into the sin of praying to them, we should remember that these heavenly beings are still employed by the Lord for the protection and deliverance of his people. When he went to the house where the people were praying for him, they could not be persuaded that the report which they heard was true, nor would they believe, till they saw him. How unbelieving is man! afraid to ask, though God has invited us to draw near to him; and when He does answer us, we are inclined to attribute the gift to every thing but to a response from the mercy-seat. God, in this instance had fulfilled his promise,—"before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." ‡

The death of Herod is here recorded as an example of God's retributive justice—some think he was smitten for usurping the title of the Messiah—"king of the Jews;" but the account given in the chapter, does not require this explanation. To please man, he had destroyed the Lord's servants, and now when the Tyrians and Sidonians came to seek his favour,§ through

* Psalm xxxiv. 7. † Acts v. 19; viii. 26; xii. 23. ‡ Isa. lxv. 24.

§ "Their country was nourished by the king's"—i. e. Judea. The Tyrians being a commercial people, neglected agriculture, and received their chief supply of corn from Judæa.—*Vatpg.*

his chamberlain, Blastus, he seemed to be carried to the greatest extent of pride and arrogancy. Josephus mentions that he held, at this time, great feasts in honour of Cæsar, and that the silver of his garment illuminated by the rays of the sun, had a wonderful appearance. The people were astonished, and regarded him as one superior to human nature. Herod did not refuse their flattery, but received it, and died in five days from the first stroke, "being eaten of worms." He felt the pains of death before he left the assembly, and is said to have exclaimed, "I whom you call a God, am commanded presently to depart this life, while providence thus rebukes the lying words you just now said to me." * His sin consisted in being puffed up with the applause of the multitude, and not giving to God the glory of whatever talents he possessed. If the like sin were always visited by the same punishment, there are many who would fall victims to it, for nothing is more common than pride, and a vain-glorious boast of our own abilities. But God hates the sin as much as ever, and will sooner or later expose and punish it, unless previously forgiven by the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAP. XIII. 1—13.

PAUL AND BARNABAS SENT FORTH—THEY GO TO PAPHOS—SERGIUS PAULUS CONVERTED—ELYMAS OPPOSES, AND IS STRUCK BLIND—MARK LEAVES THE APOSTLES.

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers: as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to *their* minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name *was* Bar-Jesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man: who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also *is called* Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on

* Josephus Antiq. lib. xix. c. viii. J. 2.

him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord *is* upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphilia; and John departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

In the concluding verses of the last chapter, we heard that Saul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch, after having executed their commission of taking relief to the brethren at Jerusalem.* It now pleased the Lord to set apart these two disciples, for the special work of preaching to the Gentiles; and we accordingly hear of the solemn manner in which they were invested with apostolic authority. As the prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." A striking testimony to the personality and deity of the blessed Spirit; which shows, also, that ordaining for the ministry of the word is specially carried on under his direction. Saul had, indeed, been called by Christ before to the apostleship, but now he is publicly ordained with Barnabas, by the prophets of Antioch. And thus the number of twelve itinerating apostles was filled up. James the elder having been slain by Herod, James, the Lord's brother became resident bishop of Jerusalem.* We may learn from the call of Saul and Barnabas, that two things are needful for the ministry—the inward guidance of the Holy Ghost, and the outward ordination by due authority. This divine influence is considered by the Church of England to be so essential, that she requires all candidates for ordination to say whether or not they are "inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit to take that office upon them." † It is much to be feared that many an individual, even at this most solemn service, answers "I do," while, at the same time, his life bears decided testimony that he is not fit for such an office. Let such meditate upon the words of Ezekiel, "Woe be to the shepherds that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ye eat the fat, and clothe you with the wool, but ye feed not the flock." ‡

Among other places which Saul and Barnabas visited, was

* See chap. xi. 28, 30. † Dr. Hale's Chronology.
‡ See the form of ordering of priests, Book of Common Prayer.
§ Ezek xxxiv. 2, 3.

the island of Cyprus, of which Salamis on the eastern coast and Paphos on the western, were celebrated cities: at this latter place a remarkable circumstance occurred, which at once proved the advantage of being favourable to the Gospel, and the danger of opposing it. The Roman deputy, or governor of the island, whose name was Sergius Paulus,§ desired to hear the apostles preach; but a certain magician, named Elymas, used his influence in opposition to the apostles, and tried to prejudice the governor against them. The rebuke of Paul was not only justly severe, but prophetic. This sorcerer was indeed a "child of the devil," because an "enemy to all righteousness," especially to the Gospel of Jesus; and hence the apostle forewarned him of an impending judgment, indicative of his blindness to spiritual things. The punishment with which he was immediately visited, stands on record as an awful warning to those who "pervert the right ways of the Lord," by hostility to vital religion. There are many such in the present day. They are not satisfied with a carnal opposition to the truth, but they seem anxious to pervert others, and draw them from the ways of God. How agonizing will be the reflection of such sinners in hell! They will hear the bitter reproaches of souls ruined by their evil words and works. This will be an aggravation of the pains of hell. Let us pray to be delivered from such miserable fruits of sin. Like the deputy, let us see the hand of God, and submit to him. Such was the effect on him, through the judgment on Elymas. God can bring good out of evil, and even use Satan's efforts to the furtherance of the Gospel. "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure."

A painful circumstance is next recorded. John, surnamed Mark, whom the apostles had taken upon their mission, (v. 5,) now became weary, or fearful, we know not which; but, yielding to some evil suggestion of Satan, he left the work, and returned to Jerusalem. That this was but a temporary fall, we may safely conclude, from his accompanying again his uncle Barnabas in his travels,* and from Paul's after commendation of his fitness for the ministry.† Yet his conduct was the cause of much unpleasantness between Paul and Barnabas,‡ and must have cost himself many hours of bitter sorrow. What reason have Christians to pray, "Lord, hold up my goings in thy

* Saul, according to some was called Paul, after his convert Sergius Paulus. But as he met with Romans at Cyprus, it is probable that the name Paul was given to him by them.

† Chap. xv. 37. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 11. § See chap. xv. 38.

paths, that my footsteps slip not." We are weak as infants, and are only safe when we firmly hold the hand of Jesus; or rather while he firmly holds us; for we would often let go that hold if left to ourselves: but, praised be the Lord, his people are "kept, *by his power*, through faith unto salvation."

CHAP. XIII. 14—52.

THE APOSTLES COME TO ANTIOCH—PAUL'S SERMON—THE JEWS REJECT HIS MESSAGE—MANY GENTILES BELIEVE.

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye* men *and* brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with *his* hand, said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that, he gave *unto them* judges, about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God, according to *his* promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: When John had first preached, before his coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not *he:* but, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of *his* feet I am not worthy to loose. Men *and* brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*. And though they found no cause of death in *him*, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people, And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another *psalm*,

Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath-day came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

Barnabas and Paul, in the course of their missionary travels, arrived at Antioch in Pisidia, which is so described, to prevent our mistaking it for Antioch in Syria, where believers in Christ were first called Christians. Paul, as his manner was, went into the synagogue, and there, being allowed to speak, he preached the gospel of the grace of God. He commenced his sermon by a brief, but striking reference to Jewish history—a subject that must have been gratifying to his auditors of that nation. Paul was well versed in the knowledge of the Old Testament, and he now made use of it. It is a shame for professed Christians to be more ignorant of their Bible than Jews: yet such is often the case.

Paul began with a subject ever gratifying to a Jewish ear—a rehearsal of the distinguishing mercies vouchsafed to that nation, from the time of their departure out of Egypt to the time of David; and having arrived at that point, he easily passes over to his ultimate object, saying, "of this man's seed

hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." * Then, after showing that his rejection by the Jewish nation, his crucifixion by the rulers, and his subsequent resurrection, were also predicted, he made a pointed application in the 38th and following verses. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." Yes, be it known unto *you*, who read these pages, or hear them read, that through Jesus is preached unto *you* the forgiveness of sins. Who amongst us is not a sinner before God? Who does not need such a Saviour? Who should not rejoice at having such a method of forgiveness proposed to him? Let us, therefore, rejoice that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin," and "all that believe in him are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." By these declarations, the apostle not only proclaims full pardon in the blood of Jesus, but acceptance in his righteousness: by which we stand before God as if we had obeyed the law perfectly, and are treated as such by him. This should encourage us to apply to Jesus with confidence and earnestness, and so shall we find his Gospel a "savour of life unto life." But remember that we require the same warning that Paul addressed to his hearers—to neglect this salvation is to despise it—and if any of you are thus minded, the Lord thus speaks, "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!" † If you now despise salvation through Jesus, you may yet be fearfully surprised, and wonder at your folly and madness, when you are consigned to perish with the ungodly.

The effects of Paul's sermon at Antioch, is also related. It would appear that some Gentiles were present while Paul was preaching and that they were more desirous of hearing the Gospel than the Jews, for they requested that the same words might be spoken to them on the next sabbath. It is a favourable sign when persons are willing to hear, and beg for instruction. Yet some of the Jews were impressed by what they heard, for they followed Paul and Barnabas, probably with a view of obtaining fuller information, in private, upon what he had declared in public. This is another hopeful symptom, when a person seeks private intercourse with a minister of the Gospel; the minister should also encourage such inquiries; for he has thus an opportunity of coming at a knowledge of the individual's

* Psalm cxxxii. 11. † See Hab. i. 5.

case, and suiting his conversation accordingly; either by removing prejudices, and correcting errors, or administering comfort in such a way, as, from ignorance of his case and character, he might never do in public.

Agreeably with the wish of the Gentiles, Paul did preach on the ensuing sabbath, and a numerous congregation attended him, for "almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." This ought to have been a subject of rejoicing to all parties; but the prejudices of the Jews overcame them, and "they were filled with envy when they saw the multitudes." Do they not possess a kindred feeling with the Jews, who would monopolize the blessings of the Gospel, and would repress missionary exertion, by this chilling exclamation, "There are enough who need conversion at home, without travelling abroad to preach the Gospel," and who so far act upon this unscriptural principle, as to withhold their assistance in consequence? Such, surely, have never *experienced* the blessings of the Gospel of Christ, or they would labour to extend the knowledge of it to every soul upon the habitable globe.

The apostles now declared that since the Jews put the word of God from them, and "judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life," they would, therefore, turn to the Gentiles. How painful is the reflection that such numbers imitate these Jews! they judge themselves, that is, they pass sentence on themselves, as unworthy or unfit for everlasting life: their unholy tempers and ungodly lives pronounce their verdict of condemnation. It is well to judge ourselves for the purpose of ascertaining our state, and procuring a remedy; but it is bad so to live, that our lives must pronounce us unfit for the presence of God. The Gospel which the Jews rejected was made a blessing to the Gentiles. On some, indeed, the effect was only transient, but "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." This expression might, of itself, be sufficient to show that eternal life is granted according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." But Paul, who preached these doctrines, was no more tolerated by the Jews, than are they who imitate him, by many professing Christians. A violent persecution was raised, and we are told that amongst his opponents were "*devout* and honourable women"—those who, with a form of godliness, denied its power. "There is no new thing under the sun," for many are there in the present day, who pass for devout and religious characters, who, it is to be presumed, would persecute Paul if he were now on earth, since they are resolutely opposed

to those who endeavour to copy him in his zeal, and in the doctrines which he preached. But whilst the enemies of the truth rage and threaten, the disciples of Christ shall be "filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost."

NOTE on v. 48.—Some think think τεταγμένοι—may be rendered—"as many as were disposed"—referring the expression to the disposition of the hearer; but this is not only bad theology, but bad criticism—τασσω in the New Testament is not used for inward dispositions, but for arrangements made for others by those in authority. See the word in the Englishman's Greek Concordance.

CHAP. XIV.

PAUL AND BARNABAS GO TO ICONIUM—THEY ARE PERSECUTED, AND FLY TO LYSTRA—THE PEOPLE REGARD THEM AS GODS—PAUL'S SUFFERINGS AND ZEAL.

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil-affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made, both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of *it*, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us, in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter: and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. *Which* when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard *of*, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities, unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. And there came thither *certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples

stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and *to* Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

PAUL and Barnabas being driven from Antioch by the persecution of the Jews, retired to Iconium, where they spoke on the great subject of the Gospel-salvation, in such a manner, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that great numbers, both of Jews and Greeks, believed. But let us observe what it was that animated these apostles, even amidst the rage of their enemies. They "spake boldly *in the Lord*," in his strength, and by his guidance; and trusting in him to bear them out, they depended not on any thing in themselves, but were "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Though many were, through the preaching of the word, brought to a knowledge of the truth, there still remained numbers unconverted, and unawakened; yes, "the multitude was divided;" some were for the truth, and others against it; none stood neuter, nor indeed can any stand in such a position; there is no middle course, no reconciling heaven and hell, no serving God and the world. How important, then, is this inquiry for each of us—"To which party do I belong?" Those who are living to Christ, though they may suffer severely from trials, afflictions, and even from persecution, yet they need not fear, for their eternal inheritance is secured; their place of rest is kept for them by that Saviour who has redeemed them.

The persecution at Iconium was made the means of planting the Gospel at Lystra and Derbe, as the apostles took refuge there from the rage of their enemies. At the former of these cities, Paul was enabled to perform a miraculous cure upon a man born lame, which so astonished the inhabitants of the place, that they took him and Barnabas for two of their deities. The people seemed determined to offer to them some sacrifice, and were only restrained by the firm remonstrance of the apostles, who

declared that they came to turn them from these vanities, to serve the living and true God—who, though he might formerly have been known to them by the works of creation, was then more clearly revealed by the preaching of the Gospel. What a blessing should we consider revelation to be? Before Christ came, our land, like all others except Judea, was plunged in the darkness of heathenism; and even now other nations are left to grope in the darkness of natural religion, and, without more knowledge of God than they can collect from his works; whilst we enjoy the Scriptures of truth, which reveal God in Christ as a reconciled Father to his believing people. Oh! what awful condemnation awaits the impenitent despisers of this inestimable privilege.

The whole life of Paul, after he embraced the faith of Christ, was an illustration of his own declaration, that "we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God." If ever he hoped to escape persecution, it must have been at this time, in the city of Lystra. He had just performed an astonishing miracle, and the people were so gratified, that they ascribed to him divine honour, and brought sacrifices to him as a god. Could it be thought that he was in danger in that place? Yet, behold, no sooner did the Jews come from Antioch and Iconium, to stir up the people against him, than their minds were changed, and they stoned him as an impostor whom they just before proposed to worship as a god! Popular applause is as changeable as the wind. The Christian minister must never consult it. He has his instructions in the word of God, and he must never lay down his arms through fear of, or confidence in, man.

The Lord was pleased to work a miracle for Paul's recovery, as we find that, though left as dead, he was enabled to proceed the next day on his journey; and let us observe where he went; after preaching the Gospel at Derbe, he returned to Lystra —the place where he had been stoned, and to Iconium and Antioch—where he had been formerly expelled, and from whence the persecuting Jews, who had caused him to be stoned, had followed him. But he had a work appointed him in these cities, and therefore, he shrunk not from it—he wished to confirm the souls of those who now professed the religion of Jesus: he therefore exhorted them to stedfast continuance in the faith, and held out to them the glorious prospect of an everlasting kingdom; yet he reminded them that the way to this blessed rest is one of sorrow. This is God's general dealing with his people; we need tribulation to refine us, and to keep us awake in this dangerous

world. The apostles also ordained elders or ministers in these cities, for the edification of the Church and the conversion of unbelievers. How full, then, of zeal for Christ, and love for souls, were these servants of God! May God give more of the like spirit to those who profess to tread in their steps. May the ministers of the Gospel labour more abundantly to preach the Gospel, and to confirm the souls of those who have been awakened by their ministry; and may the people, seeing what difficulties their ministers have to encounter, pray for them continually, that they may be bold to "teach those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding them."

NOTE on v. 23.—χειροτονήσαντες—"ordained" seems to refer to the ancient mode of electing to an office, viz. by stretching out the hands, (See Potter's Antiquities, lib. i. cap. 11.) Here it is referred to the apostles; the people might recommend fit men as stated pastors, but the Apostles *elected* and *ordained* them. So now, Bishops, who are the Apostles' successors, as rulers of the church, appoint the presbyters or stated pastors. The people may look out men of good report, chap. vi. 3, but they cannot give a call, or appoint.

CHAP. XV. 1—21.

DISSENSION ABOUT CIRCUMCISION—THE GENTILES ARE DECLARED FREE FROM LEGAL OBSERVANCES—THE LIBERTY THAT IS IN CHRIST.

And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When Paul therefore and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders, about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and *of* the apostles and elders; and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us: And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas

and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day.

THE instruction which this chapter contains, is of the greatest importance, forasmuch as it decides that much disputed question, whether obedience to the law is to form any part of a sinner's ground of acceptance in the sight of God. The point in dispute among the early Christians, was, whether the ceremonial part of the law was binding upon Gentile converts: certain men from Judæa, converts to the Gospel and yet unwilling to give up the ceremonial law, came down to Antioch, and taught the brethren, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Against this error Paul and Barnabas entered their solemn protest, shewing, doubtless, as Paul did afterwards to the Galatians, that all who were circumcised were debtors to do the whole law, and, therefore, Christ could profit them nothing.* Not that the mere act of circumcision was sinful, for Paul himself circumcised Timothy, "because of the Jews which were in those quarters," † his mother being a Jewess, and Paul was anxious to remove the prejudices of his nation. But he opposed this and every Jewish rite, when they were made necessary to justification: he would not consent to Titus, who was a Greek, being circumcised,‡ and he warned all men against mingling any rite or any work with the finished and perfect work of "the Lord our righteousness."

When Paul and Barnabas could not persuade these men to hold fast by the integrity of the Gospel, it was resolved that the matter should be referred to the Church at Jerusalem, and that these apostles should go up there, for the purpose of consulting upon the question.§ They accordingly did go, and on this oc-

* Gal. v. 2, 3.
‡ Gal. ii. 3—5.
† Acts xvi. 3.
§ See Gal. ii. 1, 2.

casion the apostles and elders of the Church met together. This meeting is usually called the first general council, though not strictly so; it certainly appears to have been the last of which it could be said with certainty, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," &c. None, besides, could claim infallibility or inspiration; and generally speaking, they were full of corruption and error. After the point had been long debated, Peter rose, and offered it as his opinion, that since God had made no distinction between those to whom he had given the Holy Spirit—having given it alike to circumcised Jews, and to uncircumcised Gentiles—therefore, the apostles should not make a distinction which God had not required, nor insist that the Gentiles should conform to the Jewish law, when God had blessed them without it.

After Peter's sentiments were delivered, Paul and Barnabas confirmed his argument, by stating what God had done among the Gentiles by them; which at once convinced the whole assembly; and James, the son of Alpheus, who seems to have been the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and to have acted as president of the council, then gave his decision with authority. "My sentence is," &c. Had Peter thus spoken, it would have been taken as a sure proof of his supremacy. James argued that the Gentiles should not be burthened with the yoke of the ceremonial law, because God had taken out of them a spiritual people, without any such condition. This view satisfied both Jews and Gentiles. His words are remarkable, and throw great light on the present and future dispensations. "God had *first* visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." This is the great object of the present dispensation; it is one of election. But *afterwards*—after God has accomplished his purposes upon the present Gentile Church, he is then to "raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen—to restore his people Israel to their land, and to their former place in his favour, and "to bring in the residue of the Gentiles."* This passage proves, beyond a doubt, that our present dispensation is not the last, previous to the commencement of eternity, but that there will be another of far greater glory, consisting of the restored Jews, and those Gentile nations which have not yet been converted. This will be the period of Christ's personal reign; at *the commencement* of which the *present* Gentile Christian Church will be judged by Christ at his coming—the believers within it being "caught up" to meet the Saviour and his glorified saints,† while

* Amos ix. 11, 12. † 1 Thess. iv. 17.

the ungodly in Christendom shall be utterly destroyed from the earth, and shall rise, with all other unbelievers, at the *general* judgment, at the end of the Millennium.* This statement respecting the present dispensation, contains the simple argument to be drawn from James's words. The Jews were now encouraged to yield the point in favour of the Gentiles, by the hopes of greater glory being given to their nation, in a dispensation which should succeed the present one; and the Gentiles were made glad at the prospect of a large ingathering into the Church of God during the dispensation of the Spirit.

CHAP. XV. 22—41.

THE DECISION OF THE APOSTLES ABOUT CIRCUMCISION—CONTENTION BETWEEN PAUL AND BARNABAS.

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas: *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*. And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took

* See Rev. xx. 5, 12, 13.

Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

THE consultation of the Apostles on the debated question of circumcising the Gentiles having ended in their fixed determination of not allowing the liberty of the Gospel to be injured, information was circulated by letters written to the churches, and conveyed by the hands of Judas and Silas. The sum of these directions was, that the Jewish law need not be observed by Gentile converts, as necessary to salvation, but that they should observe the moral precept of abstaining from fornication; that they should also abstain from eating the blood of animals, because it might excite the Jewish prejudices, though it was not of moral obligation; * and that they should avoid eating what was offered to idols, because it implied a communion with idolaters. When the Gentiles heard these things, "they rejoiced for the consolation." And truly it was a source of consolation to them, not only to find that by the deeds of the law none were to seek justification, but that the burthensome yoke of Jewish rites was removed, and believers were now to serve God in a more spiritual way. It is indeed a vain pursuit to aim at reaching heaven by an obedience to the law, because by that law is the knowledge of sin; † it shows us what we are, and how far short we have come of God's demands. Let us therefore rejoice in the declaration of Peter—"We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved." And as we are called to liberty, and not to a yoke of legal rites and sacrifices, let us pray to worship God as a Father, in the Lord Jesus our advocate. We shall thus prove our gratitude to God for our present mercies and shew to men that we use our liberty, not for sinful gratification, but in the blessed service of our heavenly Father.

We are here called on to notice a painful instance of human frailty, in two most eminent servants of God. Paul, ever anxious to be employed in his Master's service, proposed to Barnabas that they should visit the several churches which they had planted; and Barnabas immediately agreed to the proposal; but alas! they differed in opinion as to the person who should accompany them; and this led to a contention, which ended in their separation. If we dare speak, where God has not done so, we would say, that Barnabas was most in fault. Paul might reasonably have objected to take John Mark, as he

* Deut. xiv. 21. † Rom. iii. 20.

had deserted them on a former occasion;* it is also probable that Barnabas was too partial to him, as the son of his sister. We have however reason to fear that Paul, though zealous for the cause of God, might have been too severe towards this backslider. It would appear that Mark was soon restored, and even used in the ministry of the gospel,† and that Paul and Barnabas were again united as true yokefellows.‡ If it seem marvellous to any that God should suffer such chosen vessels of his grace to be entangled in such strifes; on further thought there shall appear diverse just and weighty causes. These things teach us that the holiest men are subject to perturbations of mind, and have need of the grace of God; they shew us also what need we have of "working out our salvation with fear and trembling." Who will not be stirred up to watch and pray, when he seeth such notable servants of God so grievously fall? § In a word, it is one of those distressing circumstances that occur from time to time in the church, which shows the weakness of the instrument; the need of watchfulness over our tempers, and the importance of setting aside self-pleasing in doing our Master's work.

We find that the Lord overruled this event to the furtherance of the gospel, for Paul went with Silas, and Barnabas with Mark, each to his native country,‖ where they hoped to labour with most effect; and thus more churches were "confirmed and established" than could have been done, had they executed the plan that was at first proposed.

CHAP. XVI. 1—15.

PAUL CIRCUMCISES TIMOTHY—DIRECTED BY THE SPIRIT TO GO INTO MACEDONIA.

Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father *was* a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in

* See Chap. xiii. 13. † Col. iv. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 6.
§ Homelyes upon the Acts of the Apostles, by Radulpe Gaulthere. 1572. p. 613.
‖ See Ch. iv. 36. and xxi. 39.

number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they, passing by Mysia, came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next *day* to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, *and* a colony. And we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by the river-side, where prayer was wont to be made: and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted *thither*. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us:* whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide *there*. And she constrained us.

We now, for the first time, hear of Timothy, whose character and conduct recommended him to Paul; and although he strictly opposed an observance of the Jewish law by those Gentiles who thought it necessary to salvation,* yet, when it was not considered in that light, he yielded to it as a matter of prudence; in the case of Timothy, he yielded compliance, lest the prejudices of the Jews might have prevented his preaching in their synagogues, and so have checked his usefulness. Paul then took Timothy along with him on his travels, and after two attempts to visit certain places, where God, for wise reasons, did not wish him to go, he was directed by a vision to leave Asia, and to cross over into Europe, which he accordingly did, and arrived at Philippi, a city of Macedonia.

The man of Macedonia had said in the vision, "Come over unto us and help us." Paul did not immediately discover why he was called to these parts, for it seems that when he arrived at Philippi, he remained certain days in that city; doubtless waiting for an opportunity to preach the Gospel, but none seemed to occur, and therefore he went out of the city to the river-side, where there was an oratory, or place for prayer,† used by some

* Gal. ii. 3.

† V. 13.—οὗ ἐνομιζετο προσευχή εἶναι—"where prayer was wont to be made"—rather, where there was an oratory or proseucha—the verb being merely expletive. —See Bos. These proseucha were places for prayer *without* those towns where the Jews were not allowed to have synagogues, and were near the river, for the sake of ablution. Sometimes there was no building, but retired groves.—See Robinson's Lexicon.

Jewish women. Here the Lord reached the heart of one of Paul's hearers,—Lydia, a woman of Thyatira, a vender of purple; she seems to have been the only one touched by the sermon. But her case is most instructive, as unfolding the way in which God draws the sinner from darkness to light; her conversion is an example of the great change produced in the heart of all God's children, which chiefly consisteth in these three things—to have a love in our hearts for religion, to hear the word with deep attention, and to be illuminated by the Spirit of God. Let us especially attend to these words, "whose heart the Lord opened." Lydia, was, by nature, like all the rest of mankind; her heart was closed against the truths of the Gospel, nor could she know or receive them, because she possessed not a spiritual discernment. But the Lord knocked at the door of her heart, and at the same time gave her power to open it. He fixed her attention to the subject upon which Paul spoke; inclined her cordially to embrace the truth, and thus subdued her to the obedience of faith. Now, this is the way in which the work of conversion is always effected. All means are utterly useless, if the Spirit of God does not inwardly teach and quicken us. The heart is naturally shut against God, and nothing but an act of omnipotence can burst the bars and locks of sin and prejudice. When the Lord opens the heart, he fills it with divine light and love—in fact he dwells there himself. His presence is the greatest joy of the renewed soul, and his word is not only attended to, but fed upon by faith.

Of her conversion to God, Lydia gave the plainest evidence: first, by her submitting to Christian baptism, in which her household was joined. She valued this blessed ordinance herself, and invited her children and household to share in her privileges. Secondly, by inviting God's servants to partake of her hospitality, not as a matter of mere courtesy, but with a real value for their help and ministration. She was imbued with love to the brethren when her heart was opened. May God work effectually in the hearts of all who read these pages, as he did in the case of Lydia; and then, like her, they will assuredly show by their lives, what a mighty change has been effected within them.

CHAP. XVI. 16—40.

THE DAMSEL WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION—THE CONVERSION OF THE JAILOR.

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the market-place unto the rulers. And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison-doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast *us* into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates; and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought *them* out, and desired *them* to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into *the house of* Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

It is remarkable how often Satan was constrained to bear testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the truth of his

Gospel. In the days of his flesh, the Satanic beings often acknowledged him to be "the Holy One of God."—"They believed and trembled." * The Gospel was not for them, but rather to lessen their influence, and, therefore, though they believed the facts, they did not confide in the promises. Here, again, we find a woman, possessed by Satan's influence, declaring that Paul and Silas were "servants of the most high God, who showed the way of salvation;" that she was possessed by the devil is evident, for when Paul commanded the devil to leave her, she became unable to carry on her ungodly traffic of fortune-telling. She knew that Paul spoke truth, but she followed it not.† Is not this the case with the majority of professing Christians? They acknowledge the truths contained in the Bible, but they are totally uninfluenced by them. Their belief is no more than what the devils possess—perhaps not so much—and yet they think that sufficient. How awfully deceived are such! "Faith worketh by love;" ‡ "faith purifies the heart;" § "faith overcomes the world." ‖ These are the evidences of that scriptural confidence which is "the gift of God."

This woman who had been possessed by Satan was a slave, and her owners had reaped large pecuniary advantages from her magical art. They now found that the hope of their gain was at an end, and, with great indignation, dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates; who, after beating them severely, committed them to prison. How true is it, that "the love of money is the root of all evil." ¶ Thousands lose their souls, rather than part with their ungodly gains; and there are numbers in this country, increasing their wealth by means at least not *strictly* honest; who oppose the Gospel because its tendency is to injure their traffic; for where the Gospel takes effect, it produces holiness, and a hatred of all species of dishonesty.

The jailor to whom Paul and Silas were committed, seems to have treated them with unnecessary severity. He thrust them into one of the closest cells, and "made their feet fast in the stocks." Yet the darkness and horrors of the dungeon

* James ii. 19.

† V. 16.—ἔχουσαν πνεῦμα πύθωνος—having the spirit of divination—literally, of Python—a name given to Apollo, because men inquired (παρα τὸ πυνθανεσθαί) from his oracle at Delphos—and his priestesses were said to utter predictions under his direction. This girl like them uttered strange things, apparently prophecies, but which were nothing more than a refined species of fortune-telling, suggested by Satanic influence.—See Calmet on the word "Python."

‡ Gal. v. 6.

‖ 1 John v. 4.

§ Acts xv. 9.

¶ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

could not exclude the light of God's countenance; nor could the utmost cruelties of their persecutors prevent their spiritual enjoyment. Behold them in this melancholy plight, smarting under the effects of cruel scourgings, yet so unfettered in mind and spirit, that they were heard to pray and sing hymns at midnight! Say, could any thing earthly support you under similar circumstances? Assuredly not. The thoughts of those pleasures upon which you, who are worldly, now feed, would only enhance your sufferings then. Oh! when will you be wise? when will you discover that the truly religious are, alone, the truly happy.

It soon appeared that this painful dispensation was appointed to accomplish the most gracious designs. The Lord miraculously interposed for the deliverance of his oppressed servants. While they were engaged in their devotions, we read that the earth trembled, the prison was shaken to its foundations, the doors were thrown open, and all the fetters of the prisoners were instantly broken. In this awful and wonderful scene, our attention is chiefly directed to the jailor. Alarmed and terrified, and supposing that all the prisoners committed to his care had escaped, we find him in the act of committing suicide. Paul, instead of upbraiding him for all his unkindness, endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose, by assuring him that none of the prisoners had escaped. What a sudden and great change can God effect! In an instant, we see the very man who lately had cruelly and unnecessarily thrust Paul and Silas into the most loathsome part of the dungeon, now trembling on his knees before them. His anxious inquiry now was, "What shall I do to be saved?" It was evidently the fruit of deep conviction—produced, it may be, by the terrors of God in the earthquake, or from being struck with the words and deportment of the servants of God: certain it is, no inquiry can be more momentous: and blessed be God, the reply is as clear as it is full—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." There is complete salvation in the Lamb of God, and in none other: faith is the appointed means of application to him, which makes all the fruits of his redemption our own; and in this blessed remedy there is full security—"thou shalt be saved." It is not a doubtful matter, "a yea and nay Gospel," as sometimes held forth, but all is "yea and amen." The effects, also, are most evident. The once cruel jailor is now occupied in washing the stripes of the apostles; the fierce persecutor owns the cross of Jesus, by the ordinance of baptism,

whilst inwardly he possesses a joy to which before he was an utter stranger. May we have a similar confidence in the rock of salvation, and may we exhibit the same abundant fruits of righteousness and peace.

NOTE on verse 37.—Cicero's words may throw light on St. Paul's claim of civil liberty. "Facinus est vinciri civem Romanum ; nefas verberari."

CHAP. XVII. 1—15.

PAUL GOES TO THESSALONICA—SEVERE PERSECUTION—THE BEREANS SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another king, *one* Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed: also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

WHEN Paul and Silas arrived at Thessalonica, one of the chief cities of Macedonia, they proceeded with their work, notwithstanding the severe usage they had received at Philippi. We hear that upon the preaching of the Gospel, a great many believed; but others, alas! discovered a different spirit: the house where Paul lodged was assaulted, and though he escaped,

Jason, who was his host, and some others, were dragged before the magistrates, and accused as persons disaffected to the government, and who were "turning the world upside down;" and in consequence of this persecution, Paul and Silas were obliged to fly from this place under covert of the night. It may be asked, Is that the pure doctrine of Jesus, which is every where spoken against, and which causes such animosities in cities and among families? Can that system, which breathes nothing but benevolence, and is calculated to promote universal happiness, be liable to such objections, and produce such consequences? Yes, these are the very effects which we are taught will usually attend a faithful declaration of the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus declares—that "he came not to send peace, but a sword." * Wherever his Gospel has been faithfully preached, man's opposition has been seen. It is, indeed, a source of peace to those who receive it; but to the natural man, it is a means of exciting his evil passions. We must not, however, ascribe the fault to the word of God, but to the perverseness of its opposers. The ministers of Christ must be faithful—they cannot accommodate the message to men's corrupted ideas, and say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." By so doing, they might prevent persecution; but the prospect, hereafter, would be tremendous: the deceived, and the deceiver, would perish together." †

After his departure from Thessalonica, Paul fled to the neighbouring city of Berea, and there also opened his commission in the synagogue of the Jews. The appearances were pleasing; the people discovered a much nobler disposition than the Thessalonians. They were willing to hear, and with much diligence and seriousness, compared the apostle's doctrines with the Scriptures, in consequence of which, many embraced the Christian faith. We should admire the Scripture sense of *nobility*, in the account here given of the Bereans. The word of God declares it to consist in receiving the Scriptures with all readiness of mind, and searching them *daily*. Oh! how will that word rise in judgment, to silence thousands in everlasting confusion, in whose houses the Bible, indeed, may be found, but who so neglect it, that their condemnation may be written in letters upon the dust that covers it! Yes, and strange to say, there are numbers at present who show great earnestness in sending the Bible abroad to others, who yet shamefully neglect the study of

* See Matt. x. 34. † Matt. xv. 14.

it themselves, and are but little influenced by the spirit which it breathes. The Berean inquirers did not merely read the Scriptures, but *searched* them, as if they were mines of wealth. God will not enrich the careless reader of the word; but will abundantly repay those "who mark, learn, and inwardly digest." Let us compare one part with another, and great will be the fruit—and let this be done *daily*—we need food for the soul every day, as much as for the body. And from that portion, which we may read at the family service, let us always pray to derive real profit, and to find it food for meditation through the day.

But the labours of Paul were soon closed at Berea. He was followed by the storm which had been raised at Thessalonica. The Jews pursued him with indignation, and stirred up a violent commotion. It therefore became necessary for him once more to consult his safety by flight; though Silas and Timothy, as being less conspicuous, ventured to continue there for a time, that they might carry on the work of God. Thus the opposition, as before, contributed to a more extensive propagation of the Gospel, for Paul proceeded to Athens, and Satan was defeated in his own purpose. The unbelief and resistance of some, were made the means of sending salvation to many others.

NOTE on v. 1.—Thessalonica, now Talonichi was a celebrated city and capital of the second part of Macedonia, situated at the head of the Thermaic gulf. It was a noble mart, and the most populous of all Macedonia, even now it is five miles in circumference, and contains a population of 60,000.—See Note in Bagster's Bible, citing from Clarke's Travels.

CHAP. XVII. 16—34.

PAUL GOETH TO ATHENS, AND PREACHETH THE LIVING GOD, TO THEM UNKNOWN—SOME MOCK, BUT OTHERS ARE CONVERTED TO CHRIST.

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, *is?* For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new

thing.) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, *Ye* men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation: That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead. some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which *was* Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

We now find Paul at Athens—a city most celebrated for its advancement in the arts and sciences, and the centre of polite learning and philosophy. Here was every thing to charm the eye and gratify the taste; and Paul possessed a mind so cultivated, that he was *capable* of deriving pleasure from such things, had he time or inclination for these pursuits. But his thoughts were too much occupied with more sublime and interesting subjects, to be gratified by those elegant and magnificent trifles. Had he been Saul the unconverted Jew, he would have enjoyed the refinements of that far-famed city: but being Paul, the converted Christian, his taste was formed for higher enjoyment, and therefore, Athens, with all its attractions, could give him no pleasure, while "he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." What a damp does it throw upon the Christian mind, when viewing the beauties of nature or of art, to think that those who possess them are, perhaps, making idols of them; and instead of using them as God's gifts for his glory, give them the place of God in their hearts. Whatever has our heart is our God; and let unconverted persons think as they may, they are *all* guilty of idolatry, for something else beside God has the chief place in their hearts, and that *something* is their idol.

Paul laboured to undeceive these refined idolaters. He spoke

and disputed wherever opportunity offered, and was at last allowed to give a public declaration of his opinions in the principal senate-house. The Areopagus was a place dedicated to Mars, the god of war—where the supreme court of Athens sat.* Before these Judges Paul was brought—not so much as a prisoner, as to give explanation of what they called a new religion. He entered on his subject with very different views from those of his curious auditors: they listened for the sake of novelty—he spoke for the sake of their salvation. He observed to them, that in surveying the city, and especially the temples, and the manner and objects of their worship, he had met with an altar inscribed "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Some writers think, that having imported the deities and worship of most other nations, they had erected this altar to the God of the Jews, who was always spoken of as invisible, and incomprehensible, and whose name the Jews themselves scrupled to mention. Others think, that a pestilence having cut off many at a former period, the Athenians regarded it as a plague from some unknown god, to propitiate whose favour they slew many sheep, and raised up an altar, with the inscription here referred to, wherever an animal was slain.† Be this as it may, it suited the apostle's purpose to make this inscription the text of his discourse; and he informed his learned audience, that he came to declare to them that "God," of whom, while they worshipped him, they confessed themselves ignorant. He stated that the true God was the author of all things, animate and inanimate; and in order to show that they might have known him, even by the light which they possessed, he quoted a passage from one of their poets, who stated that men were "the offspring of God;" and he argued from thence the absurdity of representing the Deity himself, by gold, or silver, or stone, however exquisitely fashioned or carved, as God could not be inferior to his creature, man, whose exterior alone could be copied in an image, without at all representing the functions of animal life, or the operations of his mind.‡

There was a peculiar wisdom and dignity in the apostle's

* See Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, and Potter's Antiquities, book i. ch. 19.

† See Horne's Introduction, vol. 1. p. 241.

‡ Dr. Hammond has well shewn on v. 22, that Athens was noted for its multitude of idols and images, and thus δεισιδαιμονέστερους (too superstitious) should be rendered—addicted to the worship of the Gods. See chap. xxv. 19. for this the proper use of the word. The Athenians were very religious—but their religion was false and idolatrous. Perhaps we should except from this the Epicureans and Stoicks, who were more inclined to infidelity than any thing else.

address; but it seems that his audience interrupted him just as he was entering on the most important topic—the resurrection of the Lord Jesus—connected as it is with his coming again to judge the world. Conceited of their own wisdom, they refused him a serious and patient hearing, and, as it frequently happens, rejected with a sneer, what they could not refute. But though many made light of his doctrine, there were a few who received what he said, and, of these, one or two of considerable rank. Let us inquire who amongst ourselves have cordially submitted to the faith of Christ? It is worthy of the acceptation of the highest ranks: but if any who fill an exalted place in society, have, like Dionysius and Damaris at Athens, been led to embrace the Gospel, how great are their obligations to that God who has removed their prejudice and subdued their pride! Let us all remember that we are no longer our own, but are bought with a price; therefore, let all the influence which our station affords, be employed in our Master's service. But are there not some who, with a show of wisdom, are obliged to confess that they worship an "unknown God?" We entreat you to listen to those who would declare him unto you. Your past times have been "times of ignorance," notwithstanding a superstitious performance of the formalities of religion. Oh! praise the Lord who has been patient and long-suffering towards you; and now hear his voice, for he calleth you to repentance. We remind you of the advent of Jesus, and that he will then execute that judgement which is committed into his hands. These things are too important to be dismissed with a sneer, or postponed to a more convenient season. Consider them with fixed attention: believe, and be saved.

CHAP. XVIII.

PAUL PREACHETH TO THE GENTILES AT CORINTH—HE IS ENCOURAGED BY A VISION—ACCUSED BEFORE GALLIO, BUT DISMISSED.

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome;) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews *that* Jesus *was* Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and

blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus, *one* that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house: and many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, Saying, This *fellow* persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O *ye* Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and *of* your law, look ye *to it;* for I will be no judge of such *matters*. And he drave them from the judgment-seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. And Paul *after this* tarried *there* yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn *his* head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired *him* to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time *there*, he departed, and went over *all* the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, *and* mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, *and that* publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

We do not find that Paul was driven from Athens by persecution, but it is probable that he withdrew from thence, finding that his message was but little welcomed by the Athenians. There were few places, if any, where the Gospel had such little effect as at Athens; and when we consider that it was a city famed for its learning, we have an illustration of St. Paul's words, "the world *by wisdom* knew not God." * Human

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

learning can never teach the knowledge of God, and when unsanctified, it often proves a hinderance to the reception of the Gospel: therefore, St. Paul again says, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise;" * that is, let him feel that all earthly wisdom is of no avail, until the soul is taught of God—for the Spirit of God alone can impart saving knowledge.

From Athens, Paul proceeded to Corinth. This large and flourishing city was the capital of Achaia, and the ornament of Greece; it was celebrated for its commerce, wealth, and luxury—for its buildings, and its schools of philosophy—but like all places without revelation, given up to riot and debauchery. It might appear to human eye, an unfavourable soil for the Gospel, but God had "much people in that city," who were to be brought out of sin and ignorance; and therefore a numerous society of Christians was collected there, as we learn from the two epistles addressed to that church. Here Paul met with two Christians, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who had lately been banished from Rome for their religion.† With them he took up his abode, and laboured at the same trade with them, that he might not be chargeable to the church.‡ He constantly preached to the Jews in their synagogue, till they blasphemed the Lord Jesus, whom he commended to them; and then he addressed the Gentiles in the house of a man named Justus. Then "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized," and the ruler of the synagogue, with his family, also embraced the faith of Jesus. When the truth is received by one in a household, it often extends to the rest; and this is especially true, when the heads of a family are called of God; they are placed in a responsible situation, and when they act with consistency, they are generally the means of blessing to others.

It would seem that Paul was somewhat discouraged at the little success of his labours, and that he had begun to yield to some desponding fears. But our Lord appeared to him in a vision for his encouragement, and told him he should be successful in planting a large church there, because he had "much

* 1 Cor. iii. 18.

† Seutonius refers to this decree of the Emperor Claudius, A. D. 51, by which the Jews were banished from Rome. Some think deservedly, because the Jews were great thieves; others, with more probability say that Claudius was jealous of Christianity, from its great spread, and that he thought that it was a sect of the Jews. See Doddridge's note on v. 2. It is pleasing to remark how profane history corroborates all the statements of facts in the Bible.

‡ See 1 Thess. ii. 9.

people in that city;" that is, many of his chosen flock who were yet to be called to the knowledge of God, though sunk in ignorance and sin until that time. God has a people to be saved, and therefore his ministers go forth to a sure work. Christ also assured Paul that "*no man should set on him to hurt him.*" When Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection against him, and brought him to the judgment-seat. They "*did therefore set on him,*" and that, too, with the greatest ferocity; but did they "*hurt*" him? No; the governor would not listen to their complaints. This occasioned a great tumult in the court, insomuch that the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment-seat. Why did they not beat *Paul?* Why did they wreak their vengeance on his friend, and not on himself? Because God had pledged himself for Paul's safety. Gallio, who, in justice, ought to have been his protector, "*cared for none of these things:*" but God cared for Paul, and it was impossible for man to *hurt* him. How safe are the Lord's people at all times! They need "not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."* But, alas! what numbers resemble Gallio, and "care for none of these things." All they ask is, to be let alone, and not to be disturbed by religion in any way. Their whole care is, how they may prosper in this world, and how they may amuse themselves; but as for their souls—how they may be saved, or how they may obtain the favour of God, a careful, anxious thought, never crosses their mind: and yet they would be offended if it was said that they were not Christians. Unworthy professors they may be, but surely the Spirit of Christ dwells not in such hearts.

We are now introduced to Apollos, a learned and eloquent man, who came to Ephesus, whither Aquila and Priscilla had removed. He was only acquainted with Christ through the ministry of John the Baptist. But he was full of zeal, and earnestly desirous of promoting the progress of truth:—he was also "mighty in the Scriptures;" that is, in the knowledge of them—the fruit of constant reading and searching the word of God. What a rebuke to many in our day, who, with many advantages, are still so ignorant of their Bibles. Let us admire the Christian manner in which Aquila and Priscilla dealt with this man. Instead of despising him for not exactly holding

* Psalm xlvi. 2.

their views, or being so experienced as they were, they were desirous of his acquaintance, that they might, in the spirit of meekness, expound unto him the way of God more perfectly; and Apollos, on his part, though so eloquent and popular as a preacher, finding them to be experienced Christians, humbly and thankfully listened to their instructions. Let us endeavour to profit by the example of these holy people; neither despising nor avoiding those who may differ from us in some points of minor consequence, or who may not be so far advanced as we are in the Christian course; nor, upon the other hand, being too proud and conceited to take advice or instruction from those whose experience entitles them to give it; ever bearing in mind, that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

NOTE.—From Corinth, by the general consent of the Commentators, the first and second epistle to the Thessalonians; and in the opinion of Michaelis, the epistle to Titus,—are supposed to have been written.—*Slade.*

CHAP. XIX. 1—20.

PAUL'S LABOURS AT EPHESUS—SOME RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST—EVIDENCE OF THEIR SINCERITY, IN DESTROYING THEIR MAGICAL BOOKS.

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were

seven sons of *one* Sceva a Jew, *and* chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus: and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all *men:* and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

PAUL, according to his promise mentioned in the last chapter, returned to Ephesus, and found there some persons that believed in Jesus as the true Messiah, according to the teaching of John the Baptist, but appeared quite ignorant of the power and gift of the Holy Spirit, saying that they had not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost was given, or not.* They had heard of the promised Spirit from John's testimony, but not of the fulfilment of the promise at the day of Pentecost, when the dispensation of the Spirit commenced. We cannot plead our ignorance of "the coming of the Holy Ghost." We have read of this great event, both to Jews and Gentiles, and every time we join in the services of the church on Whitsunday, we celebrate the presence of the Comforter in the hearts of God's people.† Surely it concerns all who profess the Christian faith, seriously to inquire whether they have received the Holy Ghost or not. That gift is promised to all who ask for it in faith; but many are deceived in this matter, and think that they have received the Holy Spirit, when its sanctifying effects can in no way be discerned in their lives. Have *we* received the Holy Ghost? The tree will be known by its fruits. Do we, then, bring forth the fruits of the Spirit? Are we led by the Spirit? Do we walk in the Spirit? Do we love spiritual things? These are questions of no small importance. Ignorance of the Holy Ghost is as inconsistent with a sincere profession of Christianity, as ignorance of Christ; and we may feel assured, that all our profession of Christianity will avail us nothing, if we discern not the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The Apostle now acquaints those he was speaking to, that John's baptism was only preparatory to that of Christ, being a good thing as far as it went, but in itself imperfect and incomplete. These disciples being

* Compare the Greek of this verse with John vii. 39, and the meaning will be found clear, as given above.

† See Collect and Services for that season, in the book of Common Prayer.

convinced of the defects of their views and faith, joyfully submitted to the teaching and advice of the Apostle, and "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus;" and the gift of speaking with tongues, and of prophesying, was communicated to them, as a proof that the Holy Ghost had been really poured out, according to Christ's promise. Paul acted now as usual, and made his first offers of salvation to the Jews, and preached to them with a holy resolution; but many were so hardened, that they did their utmost to raise in others an aversion to the Gospel, by speaking evil of it. Alas! this is no very uncommon case in our own days. How many are there, who, while they will not enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves, do all in their power to prevent others from entering in. But if they will perish, let them do so alone, and not add to their other crimes—the murder of souls.

God wrought extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, to give greater success to his ministry. Certain wandering Jews who were called *exorcists*, because they used oaths in their practice of magic, endeavoured to imitate Paul in expelling devils out of persons who were possessed. Satan tempted them to do this, with the design of imitating the true miracles, and thus bringing them into disrepute; but when they could not succeed, he impelled the afflicted man to fall on them, and so make men suppose that all miracles were fabrications. But the Lord outwitted the evil one. The failure of these exorcists only made the miracles of God's servants more manifestly true. Let us apply this to ourselves; let us see our need of Christ's strength to cast Satan out of the heart. We cannot do it by any strength of our own. Man cannot do it for us. It is the Lord's word accompanied by the power of the Spirit, which alone can effect so great a deliverance. Is this your case? Is the strong man cast out, and does Christ possess your heart? Then, bless God for his goodness to you. Still you must expect conflict and warfare; therefore, remember where your strength lies; it is not in yourselves, for we have not, in ourselves, a sufficiency even to think a good thought; our sufficiency is altogether of the Lord. We should magnify the Saviour for every victory we gain over Satan, and say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise."

We may learn a lesson from those persons who, upon hearing Paul, took their impious books, and burned them; determining that they should never more prove a snare to themselves, or to any others. They proved their sincerity by giving up a lucra-

tive trade. The books that were burned were worth fifty thousand pieces of silver, or about £1500 of our money.* This was a sure proof of their sincerity, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. Would to God that we dealt thus with our besetting sins; not sparing them, but cutting off the offending hand, and plucking out the offending eye: we should also literally copy the example of these Ephesians, and destroy all such books as are of an immoral or infidel tendency. Who can say the poison that foolish or wicked writings diffuse in the world; Christians should not injure their own minds with such trash, nor encourage their diffusion, but gladly help, when possible, in substituting in their place the word of God, and the writings of wise and holy men.

CHAP. XIX. 21—41.

THE TUMULT AT EPHESUS—THE CAUSE OF IT—MANY OPPOSE THE GOSPEL FROM WORLDLY AND LUCRATIVE MOTIVES.

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen: Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made

* Grotius thinks that because ἀργύριον is used, the shekel is intended—which if reckoned at 2s. 6d. would make a sum total of £6250. Others, like Doddridge, count the sum from the Attic drachma, about 9d.

his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians. And when the town-clerk had appeased the people, he said, *Ye* men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

After the transactions already mentioned, Paul, ever active in the service of his divine master, planned a visit to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, determining from thence to proceed to Rome. Timothy and Erastus having been sent before him, Paul remained for a short time longer at Ephesus; and in this interval a violent tumult arose in opposition to the Gospel. In most places there are some, who from their peculiar employments, or connexions in life, fear that their interest will be injured by the progress of true religion—their chief emoluments depending upon the folly and wickedness of others. When, therefore, the word of God comes with power, and turns men from their evil ways, these people, perceiving that their "craft is in danger to be set at nought," raise a grievous outcry against "that way," which alone leads to salvation. This was the case at Ephesus. Demetrius, who derived large profit from the idolatrous worship of Diana,* stirred up a furious mob against Paul and his companions; while, in opposition to them and their doctrine, they exalted the object of their own worship, crying with one voice, for the space of two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." We wonder at the extreme blindness of these benighted heathens; yet amongst Christians there are very many, we fear, who can give no better reason of the hope that is in them, or for the religion they profess, than those could, who were so zealous for the honour of Diana. Demetrius and the workmen of like occupation with himself, pretended not to regard their gains, or at least to account them as nothing, in comparison of

* By making *shrines*, rather small cases (*ναους*) containing images of Diana, or models of her temple, which were made portable and carried through all parts of Greece. See Hammond.

their religion: but it is manifest that a concern for their temporal interest was the real motive of all their disquiet: and had their gains been increased by the introduction of Christianity, instead of being diminished by its progress, they would have left to others the task of vindicating the honour of their goddess. Oh! what hypocrisy dwells in the hearts of men! "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth," will often be the *private* argument of men, amongst themselves, while the honour of the great Diana—the religion they belong to, is the ostensible pretence. Many impose not only on others, but upon themselves, and imagine that they really love their cause, whilst they only value the affluence derived from it. The selfishness of others increases their bigotry, and they end in persecuting those servants of God who draw men off from those sins by which lucrative trades are supported.

Demetrius having succeeded in influencing the populace, they were full of wrath against Paul, and acted more like maniacs, than rational beings. The whole city was filled with confusion. In what a ferment must their minds have been, when they could continue, for two hours, that senseless cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" In such instances as these, we see, in striking colours, the nature and effects of superstition, and to what lengths a blind zeal will carry its deluded followers. It debases men almost to a level with the beasts, in the ferocity of their dispositions, and the absurdity of their actions; and it is probably with reference to the transactions of this day, that Paul afterwards said, "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." *

At length the tumult was quelled by the town-clerk or recorder, a person of considerable authority, whose artful speech was made use of by the Lord to preserve the lives of the apostles. Surely we may see the hand of God even in such events: "He stilleth the noise of the seas," and what is equally intractable, "the tumult of the people." His avowed enemies come forward to promote his purposes, when he is pleased to command them. How safe are those who are sheltered by the shadow of his wings! Let our dependance, then, be fixed upon him, and not on any arm of flesh; for though many may be the troubles of the righteous, yet the Lord will deliver them out of them all.

NOTE on v. 31.—The Ἀσιάρχαι—means officers of a religious nature—who presided over the temples, games, &c. there were ten such in Asia minor, the chief one residing at Ephesus. In v. 34. γραμματεύς "town clerk" is rather—præses civitatis—the chief magistrate of a city.—See Potter's Antiq. i. p. 78—83.

* 1 Cor. xv. 32.

CHAP. XX. 1—16.

PAUL AT TROAS—CELEBRATES THE LORD'S SUPPER, AND PREACHES—EUTYCHUS IS RAISED TO LIFE.

And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto *him* the disciples, and embraced *them*, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, And *there* abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus, and Trophimus. These going before, tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi, after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man, named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing *him*, said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted. And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next *day* over against Chios; and the next *day* we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next *day* we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia; for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

THE departure of Paul from Ephesus was not occasioned by the uproar which Demetrius had excited, and which had just been quelled, as he had purposed to go through Macedonia to Jerusalem, before the tumult arose.* Now, therefore, he put his plans into execution, and having taken an affectionate leave of the disciples at Ephesus, he proceeded on his journey. Ever intent upon his work, he preached and exhorted from place to place, and after various distresses and dangers, arrived at Troas, where he remained *seven* days, for the purpose, we may conjecture, of spending a Sabbath amongst the disciples. This was

* See chap. xix. 21, 22.

said to be on the first day of the week, which proves, with other texts, that the apostles and primitive Christians always celebrated their Sabbath on the day of the week that Christ the Lord arose from the dead. To these disciples, Paul preached the word of life, and with them, he celebrated that blessed ordinance of the church, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as a means of grace, and a lively emblem of their union with Christ and his members.

How different is Christianity, as it exists at present, from what it was in the days of the apostles! How much more zeal was there, then, in the ministers of the Gospel—how much more anxiety for instruction in those who attended the worship of God! It was not for form, but for profit's sake, that the early Christians met together. Paul preached from evening "until midnight," and then continued his discourse "till break of day;" this may give us some idea of the exertion he made in the cause of Christ, and of the interest which his hearers felt, in all that related to their Christian course. The circumstances which attended that meeting may be noticed with advantage. The place where they were assembled was an upper chamber in a house three stories high: (v. 8, 9.) and, it would seem, so small and crowded, that the windows were necessarily opened for the admission of air, whilst some were constrained to sit in them, for the want of more convenient accommodation. Little do we think what a blessing it is that we have houses built on purpose for the service of God: if there were no other place for our reception than such as they possessed at Troas, it is to be feared that multitudes who now attend the worship of God from sabbath to sabbath, would be shut out from want of room, and that others would withdraw from a place where they must submit to so many inconveniences.

Yet in this place did Paul preach his farewell discourse. At what precise hour he began, we know not, but "he continued his speech till midnight," and after a short interruption, resumed it "till break of day." Do we wonder that he should so long detain his audience? No, the occasion was a peculiar one: he was about to depart on the morrow, never, probably, to see them again; his heart was full; the subject was inexhaustible; the hearts of his audience were deeply impressed, and they drank in the word of God with eagerness. Under common circumstances it would not be expedient thus to lengthen out the service of God, but if both minister and people could always meet under similar impressions, and with hearts so engaged,

how glorious would be the ordinances of religion, and how rich the benefits derived from them!

A distressing circumstance, which for some time interrupted Paul's discourse, tended, ultimately, to impress it more deeply on the minds of his hearers. A young man, named Eutychus, being overcome with sleep, "fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." What grief must have seized the whole assembly! But the apostle went down, and, by prayer to God, prevailed for the restoration of his life. Then were they "not a little comforted;" for, as regarded the young man, it would have been painful to think that he should be taken into the eternal world, under such circumstances; and, as regarded themselves, his recovery removed that stumbling-block which the accident might have occasioned to their enemies, who would represent it as arising from the unreasonable length of Paul's discourse; at the same time it acted as a confirmation of what Paul had said—as God's seal to attest the truth of it.

Alas! how many drowsy worshippers are to be found in our congregations, with far less cause for being so, than Eutychus had; and, where they are not asleep, how many hear in such a listless, inattentive manner, that they evidently take no interest in the subject, nor could they give any account of what had been spoken to them! Let it not be so with us; but let us rather come together as that assembly did—he who preaches, and you who hear, as though you were never to meet again here below.

On the following morning Paul's companions *sailed* for Assos, but he, notwithstanding his labours during the previous night—having continued his discourse till break of day—travelled *on foot;* doubtless for the opportunity which was thus afforded him, of preaching at the places through which he might pass. Oh! that all ministers of the Gospel were more conformed to Paul in that unwearied diligence for his Master's service!

NOTE v. 7.—The first day of the week—was, according to Justin Martyr, called Sunday—ἡ τȣ Ἡλίου λεγομένη ημερα—by the early Christians;—they had public prayer, the word of God was read, an explanation of it by the minister, the Lord's Supper and Alms.—See his second Apology.

CHAP. XX. 17—38.

PAUL, AT MILETUS, EXHORTS THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS.

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *And* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him: Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

THERE cannot be a more striking specimen of pastoral affection, and of ministerial faithfulness, than was exhibited at the parting scene between Paul, and the elders of Ephesus. Being in haste to reach Jerusalem, he passed by Ephesus, lest he might be detained by the tender importunities of his brethren, had he landed there. Yet being anxious to give them an impressive farewell exhortation, and to warn them of the dangers which his absence

would occasion, he sent for the elders of the church to Miletus, and there delivered to them that important and affectionate charge which has just been read.

It is owing to circumstances apparently incidental, that we are indebted for a full knowledge of Paul's character. He never willingly set about to commend himself, but was sometimes obliged, as on this occasion, to do so.* His stay among the Ephesians had been of three years' continuance; so that during that time they had abundant opportunities of knowing every thing respecting him. To them, therefore, he appealed respecting the exercises of his mind—that he "served the Lord with all humility;" respecting the labours of his life—that not only in public addresses, but by private exhortations, he had endeavoured to instruct them; and respecting the subject of his preaching—that he had uniformly preached "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." Nor was this done for the purpose of advancing his own glory: no, he had higher ends in view; he endeavoured to show them how much they were indebted to the Lord for the privileges they enjoyed; and how carefully they should watch against a departure from the faith.

What an example does Paul exhibit for the imitation of his successors in the ministry! All who occupy the episcopal office should take care that they are, like Paul, wholly devoted to the great Bishop—and that they are equally faithful in admonishing and watching over the elders or ministers committed to their care—yea, all who are employed in the pastoral office should consider this charge as addressed to themselves. Except, like Paul, they be deeply affected by the subject they treat of, how can they affect others? That which comes from the head, will only reach the head; that which comes from the heart, will, more probably, penetrate to the heart. The Christian minister "should keep back nothing that is profitable," whatever offence may be taken, or however well he might be rewarded, in temporal matters, for an unfaithful compromise. Indeed the omission of what is *profitable*, because not *pleasing*, is the great temptation and sin of many who teach no false doctrine, but who "shun to declare the whole counsel of God." In opposition to this, the preacher of the Gospel should fearlessly proclaim the truth. When he is satisfied respecting his duty, he should not be moved by the prospect of difficulties or suffering. He should

* See 2 Cor. xii. 10, 11.

value his life chiefly that he may glorify his Lord with it: his chief desire should be to finish his course with joy, and to testify the Gospel of the grace of God, so that when the time comes that he shall see their face no more, he may be able "to take God to record, that he is pure from the blood of all men."

The point which Paul peculiarly pressed upon the elders, was the duty of watchfulness; and though the Christian minister needs, especially, to follow this exhortation, yet it is needful for the servants of Christ in every situation. Who can claim an exemption from it? Can the rich? They, perhaps, of all, most need to be put upon their guard, because their dangers are increased far beyond those of any other class. Are they, whose proficiency in knowledge and grace has raised them to an eminence in the Christian life, exempt from danger? Look to David, and Solomon, and Peter, and Hymenæus, and Philetus, and Demas, and then say whether any qualifications or attainments, can place the Christian where watchfulness is needless. Be it remembered, too, that Paul himself found it necessary to "keep under his body, and bring it into subjection."* We are only safe, when, distrustful of ourselves, we "commend ourselves to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified."

The separation between Paul and the Ephesian elders was truly affecting. He concluded his exhortation by a solemn prayer. What added to the sorrow, was a consciousness on both sides, that they should not meet again, before death. There is an affinity between faithful pastors and their people, which far exceeds the common relationship in natural life; and when death, or a separation like this, which was as death, takes place, there is a great cause for sorrow. But what a relief is it to the soul of the believer, amidst the separations of life, and death, and departures of all around—Jesus departs not, but is with his people for ever! Oh! let the thought of this support us under all the various circumstances of a world passing away. Jesus lives for his people, within the veil—he loves them with unchangeable affection, and will never leave them nor forsake them.

NOTE v. 17.—St. Paul addressed the *elders* (πρεσβυτέρους) of Ephesus. St. John, some years after writes only to the Angel or chief minister of that church, Rev. iii. 1. a strong argument for Episcopacy—which the Apostles established, as the church was enlarged.

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

CHAP. XXI. 1—16.

PAUL'S COURSE TO TYRE AND CESAREA—HIS READINESS TO MEET PERSECUTION AT JERUSALEM.

And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the *day* following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, That he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way: and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till *we were* out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship: and they returned home again. And when we had finished *our* course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next *day*, we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was *one* of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul, answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also *certain* of the disciples of Cesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

After Paul had, with much difficulty and deep concern, separated himself from the elders of the Church at Ephesus, he pursued his voyage, and sailing from Miletus, passed by several places, and landed at Tyre, where he found some followers of Jesus, with whom he continued seven days. We find that these faithful disciples, when Paul was about to leave them, accompanied him to the sea-shore, where he kneeled down and prayed with them, and afterwards they took an affectionate leave of each other. Prayer is the most effectual means to soften grief, and render it beneficial. It is expedient, also, that children should be brought to witness, and to join with their parents in

their devotions; and though they should be even too young at the time, to enter into all their feelings, yet may we hope and expect, through the blessing of God, that impressions will be left, which in maturer age will have the happy result of leading them to worship God in spirit and in truth. Therefore, let parents imitate the example of these faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, who not only came themselves, but brought also their children to prayer, at the taking leave of their affectionate and much-beloved minister.

At Tyre, Paul tarried seven days, as at Troas, most likely to enjoy the Christian Sabbath. Certain disciples there said to him, by the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem—that is, if he consulted his own safety and comfort.* As such, their advice was a sort of test of his devotedness, for he went forward in the face of danger, according to the will of God. After leaving Tyre, Paul stopped for a day at Ptolemais, and then advanced to Cesarea, where he was guest to Philip the deacon,† whose daughters were endued with the spirit of prophecy. There he received more express information of the difficulties that awaited him. Agabus foretold that he should be bound, imprisoned, and delivered to the Roman power. He was therefore most earnestly desired by his companions in travel, as well as by the brethren at Cesarea, to give up his intention of going to Jerusalem. We cannot altogether approve the advice which was given on this occasion. It appears as if Satan made use of these well-meant entreaties, to cast a stumbling-block in the Apostle's way, just as he employed Peter, before, to dissuade his Lord from submitting to those sufferings which he had covenanted to endure.‡ Be this as it may—whether it was only a painful trial, or a deceitful snare—Paul yielded not to it, but expressed his determination to proceed, and his willingness to meet even death, for the sake of his beloved master.

How little are they influenced by the constraining love of Jesus, who are easily terrified from the path of duty by the apprehension of sufferings. Many desire to follow Christ, but are afraid to bear his cross. Every Christian must expect to follow Jesus in the path of trial; the word of God prepares us for it, by assuring us that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution."§ We may not be called to suffer

* Or as Calvin puts it. The Spirit in them informed them of Paul's danger—and this they warned him against—whereas the Spirit in Paul shewed him that he was *called* to these trials and therefore he persevered.

† See Chap. viii. 40. ‡ Matt. xvi. 21, 23. § 2 Tim. iii. 12.

imprisonment and death, but we must be ready to meet them, if they should be allotted to us for the sake of Christ. Even good people will sometimes say, "spare thyself," when they see us abounding with more than ordinary zeal in the work of the Lord; but while we tenderly reprove their weakness, (as Paul did,) we should be firm and steadfast to our purpose; for if once we "put our hand to the plough, and then look back, we are not fit for the kingdom of God." Happy they who feel this *readiness* of mind, to do and suffer whatever they may be called to! Let us remember that our sufficiency for this proceeds from God alone, and that if not upheld by him, we shall fail in the hour of trial. We should live nigh to the Saviour, and maintain sweet fellowship with him; so shall we find his service a delight, and whatever suffering we may be called on to endure for him, we shall easily sustain. But if once we decline from Christ in our heart, his commandments will become grievous to us, and every cross a burden.

NOTE on v. 15.—*αποσκευασάμενοι*, "took up our carriages." No English reader can make anything of this rendering. Raphelius shews that it is rather, to lay down one's baggage for the sake of expedition—except we read with some later editions, *επισκευασάμενοι*, having laden our baggage.

CHAP. XXI. 17—40.

PAUL ARRIVES AT JERUSALEM—TAKES PART IN A JEWISH CEREMONY—IS OPPOSED BY THE JEWS.

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord: and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe: and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know, that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing, but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written, *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men: and the next day purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the

accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: this is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further, brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him, in the city, Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar! Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains: and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers, for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? But Paul said, I am a man *which am* a Jew of Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

We here find Paul at Jerusalem, the end of his present journey. On the day after his arrival, he introduced his companions, the messengers of the churches,* to the apostle James, who seems to have been the only one of the twelve then in Jerusalem, and who acted in the capacity of a bishop, superintending the elders of many thousand Jews, who now believed, (v. 20.) All the elders were assembled on the occasion. After affectionate salutations, Paul proceeded to relate to them particularly what God had done by his ministry since he last saw them, at which they rejoiced, and glorified God. They, however, warned him, that, glorious as his success had been, the strongest prejudices prevailed among the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem against him; it being understood by them that he every where encouraged the Jews to neglect and forsake the Mosaic law. They advised him, therefore, in condescension to the weakness and prejudices of the Jewish converts, to join himself publicly with four per-

* See Chap. xx. 4.

sons who were bound by a particular vow of Nazariteship; in whose sacrifices Paul consented to take a part, and even be at charges with them, or take part of the expense on himself, which in this case would be the price of eight lambs, four rams, oil, flour, &c.* In these sacrifices it was customary to take a part, even though, like Paul, there was no vow of a Nazarite entered into.†

The apostle complied with this advice, not through a sinful fear, or a temporising spirit, but in order that, by conforming in matters *merely indifferent*, he might gain the more to the service and love of Christ. He had before performed a vow of a similar nature;‡ and he doubtless paid some regard to the Mosaic law, as a matter of expediency, as long as the temple remained, and the Jews were the chief converts, but he does not appear to have habitually observed it, as may be inferred from his own words.§ He now complied, as was his custom, when compliance would advance the Gospel of Christ, and was not considered as necessary to salvation. Thus, "to the Jews he became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews."‖ It is necessary, however, to distinguish between an occasional conformity to a rite, for the sake of removing prejudice, and insisting on that rite as needful to salvation. If Paul had told the Jews that the ceremonial law was necessary to be observed in order to salvation, or if he had complied with it for that object himself, or through fear of man, he would indeed have betrayed the cause of Christ; but he merely showed, that if, on the one hand, men were not to be saved *by* their observance of the law, they would not be condemned *for* a ceremonial observance, provided they did not rely upon it for justification before God. Let no one construe what is said as justifying dissimulation, or countenancing a worldly, temporising spirit; no, we must always act uprightly, as in the presence of a heart-searching God, and rather fear the loss of his favour than the frown of man. If, like this holy apostle, we have the testimony of our consciences that we are "willing to be bound, or to die for Jesus," we need not fear but that God will guide us aright.

It was not till the seven days of purification were nearly ended, that Paul was taken notice of by those who had an evil eye towards him; but then they were excited to a great degree of rage, and that, too, upon a false accusation, that he had intro-

* See Numb. vi. 14, 15.
† See Witsius Meletem, c. x. 3. quoting from Maimonides.
‡ See Chap. xviii. 18, 23. § Gal. ii. 3, 4. ‖ 1 Cor. ix. 20.

duced a Gentile into the temple: (v. 29.)—the whole city was thrown into confusion, and they would have killed him but for the timely interference of the chief captain. Thus God, who never is at a loss for an instrument to effect his purposes, rescued Paul in an unexpected manner, and defended and preserved him by one who was a stranger to him, and was probably an enemy to his religion. The Jews were very clamorous, crying out "away with him, away with him;" but Paul at length gained permission to speak to the captain, who being undeceived in his opinion respecting him, after commanding silence, allowed him to speak to the people.

And now, when we find this eminent servant of God bound with chains, we may be disposed to ask why the Lord should permit those who are dear to him to be thus deprived of liberty. Alas! we are short-sighted creatures, and can see so little of God's ways, that we cannot comprehend his plans, nor say whether an apparent evil may not lead to a positive good. We need not have any fears for those who are in Christ Jesus, whatever painful circumstances may arise, but may look in faith, for a favourable issue, being assured that those who really trust in the Lord, shall never be forsaken nor confounded.

CHAP. XXII.

PAUL RELATES HIS OWN CONVERSION—REFERS TO HIS MISSION TO THE GENTILES—HE IS PERSECUTED BY THE JEWS—HIS LIFE ENDANGERED, BUT IS DELIVERED.

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence *which I make* now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high-priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said

unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt *there*, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and *then* lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a *fellow* from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off *their* clothes, and threw dust into the air, The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was *free* born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from *his* bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we heard that Paul was bound, according to the prophecy of Agabus. Yet he was allowed the liberty of speech, by the permission of the chief captain; and so intent was he upon his Master's work, that he seems to have forgotten his bonds, as he made no mention of them, but spoke of the great things which Christ had done for him, with as much ease and cheerfulness as if nothing had occurred to ruffle him, or as if he had experienced no unjust treatment from the people. Happy is the Christian, who can be calm amidst a thousand dangers!

The circumstances which attended Paul's conversion, having been already noticed in the commentary on the 9th chapter,

need not here be repeated. We may however, just notice the confidence with which Paul appeals to his conversion as a proof of the truth of Christianity. A short time before a furious persecutor of Christ's disciples—from his infancy filled with prejudices against the Gospel—what but divine power could effect such a change? he was too shrewd to be imposed on—shewed no evidence of an excitable imagination—no object in his becoming an impostor—and had any of these motives operated at first, his sufferings, long and great as they were, would have corrected them; but he lived a devoted servant of Christ, and died a martyr to the cause. Surely nothing but truth can account for such a change.*

It is worthy of remark, that the Jews did not attempt to interrupt Paul as long as he confined himself to the narrative of his conversion; but when he came to speak of the Lord's commissioning him to preach to the Gentiles,—to take out of them a people for his name, their anger could not any longer be restrained. They envied the Gentiles that favour, and they objected to the exercise of the Lord's sovereignty in choosing them. Agreeably to our Lord's declaration, this same truth excites, at all times, the world's most bitter opposition. "Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, *therefore* the world hateth you." † Yet the minister of the Gospel must not "shun to declare the whole counsel of God," and though this truth be incomprehensible to our finite powers of mind, yet should we no more reject it on that account, than we do the doctrine of the Trinity. They are both beyond our comprehension, but they are both advanced, with equal authority, in the Bible.

Paul's life was now in the greatest danger from the rage of an infuriate mob. But the Lord, by his overruling providence, provided a deliverer, in the person of the Roman centurion. It is encouraging to observe what slender means the Lord, at times, makes use of, to stop the enemy's power. The want of sleep in king Ahasuerus, led to the deliverance of the whole Jewish nation from destruction.‡ The dream of another eastern monarch led to the promotion of Daniel, and his companions, to the highest offices in the state.§ And, here, the presence of this Roman captain saved Paul from impending death, and, afterwards, the mere privilege of a Roman citizen kept him from all the unfeeling cruelties of a Roman punishment. What a com-

* See Lyttleton's observations on St. Paul's conversion.
† John xv. 19. ‡ See Esther vi. 1. § Dan. ii. 48, 49.

forting thought is it, that each individual of Christ's Church is the object of his special care. The eye of faith can discover Christ behind the vast machine of this world's government, and can view each movement as the result of his Almighty will, and of his master-hand. How safe must they be who are "his people, and the sheep of his pasture; whose names are engraven on the palms of his hands," in characters which eternity cannot erase.

In considering Paul's address, with a view to our own profit, we should not fail to notice with what candour he confesses his former ignorance and sinfulness, in an unregenerate state. He seems to be regardless what shame he takes to himself, so that he may thereby give the greater glory to his Saviour. Is this the case with you, who, like Paul, have "tasted that the Lord is gracious?" While Christ's name is so precious, are you lying low in the dust before him, in token of your own unworthiness? Is Paul's language yours, when he says, "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant;" "By the grace of God, I am what I am;" "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief?" Oh! then tell it abroad, as he did, and in every direction proclaim the blessed truth. Paul was indeed free-born, in having the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen—either because Tarsus was favoured by Julius Cæsar, or because some of Paul's ancestors had been rewarded for their public service—but he was free-born in a higher sense, when, by a new birth in regeneration, the Lord made him free. This is a freedom not to be purchased by money; it is the purchase and gift of Jesus alone. And as it made Paul a citizen of no mean city, so it saved him from the cruel power of Satan, and secured for him the eternal privileges of a kingdom, which cannot be moved, whose maker and builder is God. "If the Son, therefore, shall make *you* free, ye shall be free indeed."

CHAP. XXIII.

PAUL BEFORE ANANIAS—PROPHESIES OF HIS DEATH—CONTENTION OF THE JEWISH SECTS—THE JEWS CONSPIRE AGAINST PAUL'S LIFE.

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, *thou* whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten

contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring *him* into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto *him*, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought *him* to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto *him*, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went *with him* aside privately, and asked *him*, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now they are ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain *then* let the young man depart, and charged *him*, *See thou* tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. And he called unto *him* two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen three-score and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide *them* beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring *him* safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix *sendeth* greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it

was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what *they had* against him. Farewell. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: Who, when they came to Cesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read *the letter*, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that *he was* of Cilicia: I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment-hall.

THE Apostle Paul was now a prisoner at Jerusalem, in the custody of the Roman soldiers. He had been, with difficulty, preserved out of the hands of a Jewish mob, and the great council of the Jews being summoned for his trial, he proceeded to make his defence. He maintained before them the integrity of his conduct, though he had been apprehended and accused as a criminal. His manner, as well as his speech, betokened a holy firmness: but the declaration of his conscientious attachment to the law of God, excited the anger of the high priest, who, in violation of all the forms of justice, ordered him to be smitten on the mouth. Paul immediately declared that God would punish him for his base hypocrisy and injustice. "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." And this prophecy was fulfilled in a remarkable manner: for Ananias, five years after this, was assailed in a popular tumult, raised by his son; and though he tried to hide himself in an old aqueduct, he was dragged out and killed.* Some conceive that Paul spoke too hastily, in forgetfulness of the high priest's office, and that he acknowledged his fault by saying, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest." He might however easily have made a mistake, for, strictly speaking, there was no high priest at that time—Ananias having been deposed, and Jonathan having been murdered by Felix—there was strictly no high priest until Ishmael was raised to the dignity by Agrippa; hence there was a vacancy at that precise period, and Ananias merely acted as president of the council in this emergency.† Paul showed all obedience to constituted authority: and by the Spirit's inspiration has inculcated this lesson.‡ We should not speak evil of our rulers. "The powers that be, are ordained of God;" and even when they shamefully violate those laws by which they should govern and be governed, we should let our

* See Josephus' Wars, Lib. xii. c. 17.

† See Josephus, Antiquities, lib. xx. c. v. and vi.

‡ Rom. xiii. 1.

expressions of disapprobation be tempered with the mildness of Christian charity.

Another circumstance now occurred which showed that Paul made use of all lawful means for his preservation, even whilst he showed all readiness to give up his life in the cause of the gospel. He observed that part of the assembly were Sadducees—who deny that there is any resurrection of the body, or any angelic beings—and that the rest were Pharisees, who in these doctrines held with Christians, though otherwise so erroneous. He therefore immediately confessed that he was so far a Pharisee in these views, and that he did not agree with the infidel Sadducees; and further, that he had been educated a Pharisee of the strictest sect. This had the desired effect—the two parties fell into contention one with another, and the apostle was delivered from their wrath. Some persons conceive that Paul acted a part of duplicity, and served himself by worldly means. It appears, however, that he spoke correctly, though he did not bring forth all his views, because not then required. It was a factious rabble, and not agreed among themselves, and Paul might not only with propriety deliver himself from them, but show the folly of the opposers of the Gospel, when brought into conflict. Our Lord's appearance to him (v. 11,) is a sufficient proof, that he did not act wrong. The Lord encouraged him to go on with his work, and not to fear the wrath of man. "Be of good cheer, Paul, *for* as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome:" as much as to say, "you have undergone a great deal of trouble for me, you must undergo a great deal more." But this was, in fact, a source of comfort to the apostle, for he derived pleasure from the promotion of the Gospel, even at the expense of personal pain and suffering. "To him, to live was Christ, and to die was gain." Would that all Christ's ministers had so disinterested an object in view!

Though Paul had escaped the late danger, yet a fresh one awaited him at Jerusalem. Such was the fury of his opposers, that more than forty of them entered into an impious combination, and bound themselves under a curse, to take away his life *i. e.* they desired that God might curse them, if they did not effect their object. How many, alas! imitate these abandoned sinners, and pray that God may damn them if they do not act as they promise. This is a fearful appeal to God, who might justly answer it by giving them that damnation which they have called down on themselves. Even the chief priests and elders

concurred in the murderous design. But, though the horrid plan might seem to be well concerted, it was detected by the providence of God. The conspirators kept the matter so little secret, that it came to the ears of Paul's nephew, who informed him of it, and then, by Paul's desire, related it to the Roman officer; in consequence of which, he was immediately removed under a strong guard, to Cæsarea, and thus the plot was defeated. Whether the conspirators observed their oath, and starved themselves to death, we hear not; but in any case, they called for the curse of God, by keeping their oath, or by the breach of it, though the breach of it was preferable to the observance. In what an awful situation does sin plunge men—they get into Satan's net, and in trying to escape its miseries, without giving up their sins, they often find themselves entangled more deeply than before. Lord! teach us to follow thee with decision, and so to walk in holy liberty.

CHAP. XXIV.

TERTULLUS ACCUSES PAUL BEFORE FELIX—THE APOSTLE'S DEFENCE OF HIMSELF—HIS FAITHFUL TESTIMONY.

And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and *with* a certain orator *named* Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse *him*, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept *it* always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man *a* pestilent *fellow*, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came *upon us*, and with great violence took *him* away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in

the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and *toward* men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same *here* say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of *that* way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let *him* have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

THE high priest and elders of the Jews were so intent upon persecuting Paul, that they hastened to Cæsarea; and in order to render their cause more specious before the governor, they retained a noted orator as their counsel. This orator, named Tertullus, addressed the Roman governor, Felix, in terms of the basest flattery, complimenting him upon the wisdom and excellency of his administration, though he was notoriously infamous for his oppression, being both a bad governor and a bad man. He then inveighed against the prisoner, as having excited a seditious spirit through the whole body of the Jews, polluting their temple, and being the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Almost every clause in his speech contained a palpable falsehood. What will not man do for the sake of money! That person greatly errs who imagines that he is not chargeable with the untruths which he may utter for his client. The word of God allows of no such distinction. He that states what is not truth, whether for himself or for another, and, still worse, for money, is a transgressor against the law of God; nor can all the ingenuity of argument remove the justness of the imputation.

In the midst of all this falsity and flattery, Paul stood unmoved; and when permitted to answer in defence, he showed the differ-

ence between the artful compliments of a courtier and the respectful address of a Christian. He protested his innocence, and challenged his accusers to prove their charges. He acknowledged, indeed, that his religious conduct was what they deemed, heretical, but maintained that it was conformable to the ancient Scriptures, in which he had been educated, and that his hope of a resurrection was what they themselves allowed.

As Paul was accused of heresy by the Jews, so are they now called heretical who strictly embrace the doctrine which Paul taught. As long as men merely hold his sentiments in a speculative manner, they give no offence; they are even allowed to be orthodox: but when they are *practically* maintained, and are shown to influence the life, then they are branded as heretical. It is in vain that the faithful follower of Jesus appeals "to the law and to the prophets;" it is in vain that he shows to men that these are the things "which they themselves allow;" in vain does he refer to the articles and homilies of the Church in which he was educated, or to the prayers which every member of that Church offers up to God; nothing can convince men that he is not heretical. Practical Christians are still "a sect everywhere spoken against." Now what is the reason of this? Whence is it that the same truths which are approved in theory should be disapproved when reduced to practice? The reason is, that whilst held only in theory, they leave men in full possession of their evil habits and propensities, but when applied to practice, they produce a course of life directly opposite to the desires of the flesh, and the habits of the world. Hence, therefore, the enmity to *practical* religion—"they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." But let the world oppose as they please, the Christian must "worship the God of his fathers" according to "that way which they call heresy."

The result of this trial was not satisfactory to either party. Paul was neither condemned nor discharged, but reserved for a further hearing. Felix, however, allowed him more liberty than was usual, and even showed some desire to be acquainted with the doctrine of so extraordinary a preacher, for he sent for him, that he and his reputed wife, Drusilla, might hear him "concerning the faith in Christ." The conduct of Paul on this occasion was becoming a faithful minister of the Gospel. Had he been more intent upon his own interests than upon his Master's service, he had now a fine opportunity of obtaining his release by such preaching as would gratify his judge. But no sordid motives influenced him. He would not lose so favoura-

ble an opportunity of preaching the truth to a heathen prince, the circumstances of whose life show the fidelity of Paul. Felix was not only notorious for oppression, but profligacy. He had induced Drusilla to leave her own husband, and to live with him, and they were living in this wicked state when Paul reproved and admonished the governor. He reasoned "of righteousness," to him who had practised injustice; "of temperance" and chastity, before those who were then living in a state of adultery; and "of judgment to come," that they might be excited to think of that awful account which they should render to the Lord.

The haughty judge trembled under the words of his prisoner, and therefore hastened to close the interview. He was not so hardened as to relinquish all thoughts of religion, but pacified his conscience by pleading his numerous engagements, and promised a serious attention to the preacher at "a convenient season." Did that season ever arrive? Not that we hear of: he resisted his conviction, and though he frequently after saw Paul, it was only in hope to obtain a bribe for which to release him, but we do not hear that he trembled any more. Oh! sinner, beware how you trifle with convictions. Like Felix you may be inclined to dismiss the preacher, and turn away from these offensive subjects, by which your conscience is alarmed. You may not resolve to cast off all thoughts of God, but you delay the consideration, and in the mean time Satan enters your heart, and bars it against the future admission of these hopeful convictions. Thus you perish by delay. Why, therefore, postpone your purposes to a time that may never arrive? You cannot calculate on an hour. Yield to your convictions now: close not your ears against the truth, but desire to feel its full influence: and soon will your horrors and distressing apprehensions give place to the liveliest sensations of hope and joy.

CHAP. XXV.

FESTUS SUCCEEDS FELIX—HIS MODE OF TREATING PAUL—THE APOSTLE BROUGHT BEFORE AGRIPPA.

Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him. And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsa-

rea, and that he himself would depart shortly *thither*. Let them, therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with *me*, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment-seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof they accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go. And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews informed *me*, desiring *to have* judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked *him* whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to kept till I might send him to Cæsar. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and *also* here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes *laid* against him.

THE conduct of Felix during the latter part of his government proved that he had been successful in banishing those tender

emotions which Paul's address had excited; for, contrary to all the principles of justice, he kept him in confinement for two years merely to gratify the Jews. Scripture says, that "the *fear* of man bringeth a snare;" and, we may add, so does the *love* of man's applause. Happy they, who are delivered from both, by the independant spirit of the Gospel.

At the end of that period, Felix was succeeded by Festus, who was sent by the Roman government, in his stead. But even two years had not availed to calm the revengeful spirit of the Jewish rulers against Paul; for no sooner had Festus gone to Jerusalem, after entering upon his office, than they petitioned against Paul—unjustly prejudicing the governor's mind, and making him a party, who was to be the judge, by iniquitously begging "*favour* against him," whereas they should only have asked for *justice*. This favour was, that he might be sent for to Jerusalem, so that they might murder him ere he arrived. But the Lord defeated their plans, by moving Festus to refuse their request; and when we remember what a useful witness to the truth Paul was—how he was employed for the edification of the churches, and the conversion of sinners, we cannot but admire the overruling hand of God in the resolution of the governor. The Lord orders all things for the good of his church, by secret springs that men cannot see. And especially by a constraining influence on men's minds, which sometimes restrains them, and sometimes impels them, without their being able to account for it. The cause came on again at Cesarea, when, after the same groundless and malicious charges as before, no crime was proved against him. Festus, however, more willing to gratify the Jews than to act with impartiality, was disposed to remove the hearing to Jerusalem; but Paul, conscious of what would be his fate if such were done, adopted the only course that was left for him, and standing upon his rights as a Roman citizen, appealed to the emperor of Rome. This appeal, which stopped or suspended all further proceedings in the lower courts of the empire,* was not the effect of cowardice; he did not shrink from bonds, or death itself; but by so doing, he prudently avoided danger, and thus a way was opened for his being sent to Rome, agreeably with what the Lord had declared.

We may take occasion here to notice the differencc between the character of Festus, and that of Paul. The one was influenced by the praise of man—the other, by the praise of

* See Pliny's Epistles—He states that he would not put to death Roman citizens converted to the Gospel, but sent them to Rome.—Lib. x. Epist. 37.

God. The love of man's applause is a common principle. When a person is first impressed with a sense of eternal things, he is often tempted to consider what men will say of him. Though he may never have paid much attention to the sentiments of others before, he will then feel the emotions of fear and shame. Satan will suggest how he may reconcile the performance of his duty with a conformity to the customs and habits of the world, and will often urge him to strain his conscience, to make compliances with the world, in order to escape reproach on account of his singularity. By divine teaching we are led to see, that "it is a very small matter that we should be judged of men; he that judgeth us is the Lord."* It is equally vain to seek man's praise. What can the applause of man do for us? It is a mere breath of air that vanishes in a moment. The approbation of God is of incalculable importance, and as it is that which will decide our eternal state, it is that also which should influence our conduct. If the whole world cannot compensate for the loss of our soul, surely they must be foolish, indeed, who barter their souls for the sake of man's applause.

Before Paul proceeded to Rome, another opportunity was offered him, of declaring the truths of the Gospel before certain personages of exalted rank. Agrippa was son of Herod Agrippa mentioned before.† He was only seventeen at the death of his father. The Roman emperor made Judea a province, with a governor, and gave this Agrippa, Chalcis, Galilee, &c. Bernice was his sister—a woman of vile character. She was first married to her own uncle, and then lived in incest with her brother.‡ They came down to Cesarea to pay their respects to the new governor, Festus. During their continuance at Cesarea, they were made acquainted with the case of the apostle; and as Festus was in doubt what crime to charge him with, when transmitted to Rome, and as these illustrious strangers were curious to hear this extraordinary prisoner speak, a day was appointed when Paul was to exhibit before them. They accordingly assembled; but what a difference do we observe between Paul and his auditory. *He*, intent upon their salvation, and waving all personal grievances for the sake of improving this opportunity; *they*, anxious to make a public

* 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. † See chap. xii. 1.

‡ This seems alluded too by Juvenal, Sat. vi. 157. Suetonius mentions that the Emperor Titus wished to make this wicked woman his wife, but was prevented by the clamour of the Romans.

parade of their state and retinue, and to be amused by the eloquence of the preacher. Who that is wise, would not prefer the chains of Paul, and his Christian spirit, to the pomp of Agrippa, and his bonds of iniquity? Yet thousands who call themselves wise, make the opposite choice, and prefer the world's admiration, with a gaudy display of worldly pomp, to the substantial enjoyment of a sincere Christian.

We must not pass over, unimproved, an expression which Festus made use of when relating to Agrippa the points in dispute between Paul and the Jews. He said they were "questions of their superstition, and of *one Jesus*, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." 'Tis true he *was* dead; but is it a matter of such light importance whether he be now alive or not? Is the Gospel a mere superstition? Is the name of Jesus to be used in this light and irreverent manner? The day is at hand, when Festus, and all the world, shall know, that the temporal concerns of the vast Roman empire were frivolous, as the sports of children, when compared with the single question—whether Jesus the crucified, was raised from the dead or not. Blessed be God, we are not left in doubt upon this momentous point. Jesus himself says afterwards by his apostle John, "I AM HE THAT LIVETH, AND WAS DEAD; AND BEHOLD I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE."*

CHAP. XXVI.

AGRIPPA HEARS PAUL'S DEFENCE, IS ALMOST PERSUADED TO BE A CHRISTIAN.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially *because I know* thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews: Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which *promise* our twelve tribes, instantly serving *God* day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem:

* Rev. i. 18.

and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill *me*. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

Paul now having liberty to speak for himself, stretched forth his hand in an attitude of earnest request for silence and attention, on the part of his hearers. He began his defence by acknowledging his advantage in pleading his cause before Agrippa, who was acquainted with the Jewish laws and customs, better than any other Roman governor. Paul then related the manner of his life, in his younger years, nearly in the same words as he

had before done in the twenty-second chapter, and also gave the same account, as in it, and in the ninth chapter, of his going to Damascus, and of his wonderful conversion. One part of that occurrence he dwelt on more largely here, viz.—Christ's description of his future ministry—he was to be sent to the Gentiles, and to preach the Gospel of peace to them,* and that with the express purpose of turning them from darkness to light—of opening their eyes, and of delivering them from the power of Satan, that they might live to God. In this our Lord sets forth our miserable condition as Gentile sinners, and the wonderful revolution the Gospel produces, when applied by the Spirit. Festus, who was an utter stranger to the doctrines of the Christian faith, finding Paul to be a man of much reading and knowledge, concluded that his great learning had affected his head; but Paul removed his suspicion with meekness and respect, saying, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." The world often make the same mistake with Festus—regarding the devoted Christian as *mad*, and themselves as *sober*. In God's estimation, the reverse is the case. They are mad who prefer a straw "to a crown of glory that fadeth not away"—who for a moment's gratification forfeit eternal joy—and serve Satan, a hard taskmaster, instead of a gracious and merciful Father;—and they are truly wise who give their hearts to God—and aim at entire dedication of all to that Saviour, who loved them, and died for them! Paul then closed his speech by a touching appeal to Agrippa, respecting his belief of the Scriptures; and immediately anticipated his reply, and with admirable address, supplied his answer, "I know that thou believest;" upon which Agrippa seemed on the point of yielding an entire compliance with the Gospel, and answered, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Is not the case of Agrippa that of many in the present day? They, like him, are *almost* persuaded, and are, perhaps, under strong convictions of the duty and excellency of religion; but yet suffer themselves to be overruled by some worldly considerations, and so overcome their convictions. It is astonishing how far some will go in profession without reaching the point. They will read God's word—remember many texts—delight in the preaching of the Gospel, and even seek the company of God's people—but still they are *almost* Christians—they want

* Gal. ii. 7, 8.

two marks, particularly, to make them real Christians—they have no faith or confidence in the Lord Jesus—nor any genuine love to him.* This *almost* state is therefore most dangerous, and often proves a fatal delusion.† The apostle was struck with so remarkable an acknowledgment as Agrippa made, and knowing how little it would avail to be *almost* a Christian—in the fervency of his spirit, expressed his warm feelings, in wishing that not only Agrippa, but all that heard him, might be as happy in Christ, as he felt himself to be; that they might enjoy the same comforts in religion, without such heavy crosses.

When Paul had finished these words, they broke up the assembly, and we find, from the words of the king and governor, that Paul might have been set at liberty, as they considered him innocent, had he not appealed unto Cæsar.

And now let us pause a little, and let each of us ask ourselves, what are our feelings in considering this history? What do we think of that Saviour whom Paul preached? Have we seriously attended to the doctrines he maintained? and what impressions have they produced upon our minds? Ah! let us beware, lest we stifle our convictions, like Felix, and put off from day to day, the necessary care of our immortal souls. Let us beware, lest we trifle with the subject altogether, as Festus did. And let us also beware of being, like Agrippa, but half-persuaded. Will that satisfy our consciences? Can we, in this state, expect to inherit the promises of God? No, there must not be any "halting between two opinions." "We cannot serve God and mammon." "He that putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God." Oh, may he alone who can subdue the human heart to himself, render this exhortation effectual, and may we all be persuaded to embrace the Gospel without reserve! May the mighty influence of his Holy Spirit enable us to break through all our difficulties, and make us not only *almost*, but altogether Christians. Amen.

* 1 Thess. i. 3. † Rev. iii. 16, 17.

CHAP. XXVII. 1—26.

PAUL IS SENT TO ROME—HIS GUARD AND HIS FRIENDS—TOUCHES AT SIDON AND CRETE—FORETELLETH THE DANGER OF THE VOYAGE—HIS VISION AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto *one* named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; *one* Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next *day* we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave *him* liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy: and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; And hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city *of* Lasea. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished *them*, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, *and there* to winter; *which is* an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south-west and north-west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* purpose, loosing *thence*, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let *her* drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat; Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we, being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next *day* they lightened the ship; And the third *day* we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on *us*, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. But after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of *any man's* life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul: thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, Sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island.

We have already heard that Paul had appealed to Cæsar against the malicious accusations of the Jews. As a Roman citizen, he claimed the privilege of bringing his cause before the Emperor, for justice was denied him at the inferior tribunals, and this was made the means of accomplishing the Lord's declaration, that he should bear witness to the Gospel at Rome. Cæsar was a common name given to all the Roman emperors at that period—as was Augustus, or "the venerable," mentioned before.* The person who then sat on the throne, was the cruel and bloody tyrant, Nero. To him Paul was sent as a prisoner, together with some others, under the care of Julius, the captain of a company of Roman soldiers. This whole chapter is occupied with the details of the apostle's voyage, and stands as a monument of the Lord's power, in fulfilling his purposes, though crossed by a thousand hindrances.

During the trials that attended him, Paul was not without the comfort of Christian society, for we learn, by the use of the plural pronoun, *we*, that Luke, the writer of this book, was with him; Aristarchus, too, is mentioned as having cheerfully partaken of his sufferings, and afforded him peculiar consolation.† He was also treated with kindness by the Roman officer, who, finding that he was a man to be trusted with liberty, allowed him to be refreshed by a visit to his Christian friends at Sidon, where they touched on their passage, and who afterwards found, like the Egyptian jailor in the case of Joseph, that the Lord had blessed him for his prisoner's sake. How true it is, that "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." ‡

From Sidon they proceeded to Myra, and having there changed their ship, they were afterwards so retarded by contrary winds, that with great difficulty they reached "the Fair Havens," a port in the island of Crete, now called Candy, a large island in the Mediterranean sea. From the name of this port, we might imagine that they would there have found the shelter they wished, but its name belonged only to the prospect which it commanded, and not to its protecting situation. "It was not a commodious haven to winter in." Every fair haven is not a safe one; nay, there may be most danger, where there is most pleasure. Let us beware of making this world our haven; it will leave us exposed to all the winds of adversity, and can never shelter us from the storm of God's wrath; we should

* See Chap. xxv. 25.

† See also Col. iv. 10, 11.—Philem. ver. 24.

‡ Prov. xvi. 7.

consider it, only, as a place which we are visiting on our passage; but not where we should take up our abode, for it is by no means commodious to winter in.

As the season was far advanced, (it being near the end of September, when the great fast connected with the day of atonement was celebrated,) Paul advised that they should not prosecute their voyage; but his counsel was disregarded, and though no unfavourable occurrence immediately followed their disregard of his advice, yet, before long, it became evident that human procedures should be regulated by God's directions rather than human skill. The gentle and favourable south wind was succeeded by a tempestuous hurricane, which called forth all their exertions, and obliged them to throw their property overboard, and even the tackling of the vessel, in order to lighten it, that it might outlive the storm. See, here, a picture of the world's practice: they can be prodigal of their property when it is for the saving of their lives, but they refuse to part with it in the service of the Lord. "All that a man hath will he give for his life;" but how many choose rather to "make shipwreck of their faith," than throw overboard their sins and hindrances.

And, now, how hopeless was their situation! "Neither sun nor stars in many days appeared." We who have been blessed with the discovery of the mariner's compass, which is a guide to the sailor when neither sun nor stars appear, can scarcely sympathize with their sufferings, who were thus exposed to all the violence of a storm, without even a friendly star to guide their course. Thus we see how imperfect was their knowledge, and how unsafe their state, who had nothing by which to steer their course through the darkness of the night, but the uncertain appearance of the heavenly bodies. Let us apply this spiritually. God has denied to other nations the light of Revelation; and while they are blindly groping after knowledge, by the aid of human reason, and the works of creation, we have the volume of inspired truth, at once our lamp—our chart—our compass; and, if with all these advantages, we still make shipwreck of our faith, we shall surely perish under most aggravated circumstances.

In the midst of all this distress, the Lord appeared to his servant Paul, and gave him assurances of protection, not only for himself, but for all his companions in the ship. Paul related to them the particulars of the vision, fearlessly declaring to these idolatrous heathens, that JEHOVAH was his God—that he gloried in being his servant—and that he firmly believed that what

the Lord had promised, he would surely perform. From these few sentences we may derive much instruction. Observe Paul's situation when the Lord appeared to him. He was far off at sea, in a vessel tossed by a tempestuous storm: but no storm nor tempest can hinder the communications of God's favour to his people. In the darkest nights of woe he can find access, and afford them seasonable relief. See, too, what a blessing one pious individual may be to a numerous assembly. This, their preservation, was, doubtless, an answer to the prayers of Paul, for God was only pledged for *his* protection.* We learn, also, from the example of Paul, the benefit of confessing our allegiance to Christ, even before those who are, avowedly, his enemies. It is a cowardly principle of fear which tempts the Christian to hold back a profession of his faith before those who are unbelievers, and who might ridicule and persecute him for it; but let all who are thus tempted, keep in remembrance the words of Jesus, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." †

CHAP. XXVII. 27—44.

THE DANGEROUS VOYAGE CONTINUED—MEANS USED FOR PRESERVATION—GOD'S FAITHFULNESS—ALL ESCAPED SAFELY TO LAND.

But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country: And sounded, and found *it* twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found *it* fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the rope of the boat, and let her fall off. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought *them* all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take *some* meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took *some* meat. And we were in all in the ship, two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

* Chap. xxiii. 1. † Mark viii. 38.

And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed *themselves* unto the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoisted up the main-sail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the fore part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast *themselves* first *into the sea* and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on *broken pieces* of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

ALREADY had Paul and his companions been for thirteen days exposed to the violence of the storm. Well might he afterwards speak of having been "in perils in the sea." On the fourteenth night the sailors suspected they were approaching some land; accordingly, they ascertained the depth of water in which they were, and finding that it became more shallow as they advanced, they were then confirmed in their apprehension, and therefore cast anchor, lest the ship should be dashed upon the rocks. Thus they waited, and longed for the morning's dawn, to make known to them their situation. How prudent are men in all that concerns their temporal welfare. The sailor drops the line; the merchant balances his accounts; and if danger at all threatens, precautions are immediately used. But thoughtless man goes madly on, without calculating whether his soul is in danger: and, more madly still, proceeds, though the danger is clearly pointed out to him. Let the humble Christian here also learn an instructive lesson. When his Saviour is concealed from his sight, and all within is gloom and darkness, let him still exercise faith, till the day-dawn, and the day-star of hope proclaim the welcome return of the sun of righteousness.

It will be profitable, now, to notice the several instances which are here recorded of Paul's diligence in the use of all proper means of safety, even after he was assured that no individual should perish. When the peril of shipwreck became more imminent, the sailors were providing for their own safety in the boat, under pretence of rendering needful assistance to the vessel. But Paul, perceiving their intention, told the centurion, that unless they remained to work the vessel, they could not be saved. This may appear contradictory to the Lord's former declarations, unless we recollect that God ordains *the means* as well as *the end;* and to seek the one without using

the other, is to *tempt* God, and not to trust him. Again, after this, Paul urged the company to take some refreshment, as a farther means of enabling them to meet the exertion which would still be required of them: and then they had recourse to a more decided mark of instrumental aid, for they lightened the ship, by "casting the wheat into the sea." It is of great importance to observe these things, as reflecting light upon the manner in which God accomplishes all his promises to us. He "has given us exceeding great and precious promises," and not one of them shall ever fail; * but we are not therefore at liberty to sit down idly, and to expect salvation without any use of means on our part. We must work as if salvation wholly depended on our own arm, and, at the same time, we are to trust in God as simply as if no effort whatever were used by us. This is the mode prescribed by God himself. He tells us that "eternal life is *the gift* of God, through Jesus Christ," yet he says, "*labour* for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." † The consideration of God's promised aid is so far from superseding our own personal exertions, that it is our great encouragement to put them forth; and to look for salvation in any other way than in that which God has marked out, is to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. The means and the end are equally ordained of God; and what God has joined, it is sinful for man to try and put asunder.

At length the wished for morning's dawn arrived, and discovered that land which already was conjectured to be nigh. They endeavoured to direct the ship into a creek, but, through the violence of a current, they were driven upon the sand, and, by the force of the waves, the vessel was broken in pieces. Paul was now exposed to more than common danger, for the soldiers inhumanly proposed to kill the prisoners, to prevent their escape; but the Lord overruled this for Paul's sake, and all having leave to provide for their own safety, the word of God was fulfilled in the preservation of every individual.

How beautiful, yet simple, is the language with which this chapter closes. "*And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*" Yes, the Lord had said it, and it must be accomplished. Even from the mouth of Balaam, the Lord has forced this confession—"God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said,

* See 2 Cor. i. 18, 19, 20. † John vi. 27.

and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"* We may depend upon it, that it shall so come to pass with all the Lord's family, embarked as they are with Christ, and passing through the storms and tempests of this world. Jehovah hath given to his dear Son all that are with him in the ark, and he will "bring them into the haven where they would be." "Oh! that they would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

CHAP. XXVIII. 1—15.

PAUL AT MELITA—PROCEEDS WITH HIS JOURNEY—LANDS IN ITALY—SOME BRETHREN COME FROM ROME TO MEET HIM.

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid *them* on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the *venomous* beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded *us* with such things as were necessary. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried *there* three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium; and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage.

We now find the shipwrecked voyagers collected once more in safety. They knew not at first where they were, whether upon

* Numb. xxiii. 19.

a continent, or an island; but in accordance with the word of God,* it proved to be the latter: its name was Melita, now called Malta. The inhabitants, here called "barbarous," (an appellation given by the Greeks and Romans to all unlettered nations,) showed great kindness to them, and relieved their sufferings, by affording fire and shelter. Barbarous as these people may be *called*, they were far less so indeed, than many in this *civilized* country, known by the name of "wreckers," whose habit is to plunder the vessels which may be driven upon their shores; and instead of treating the shipwrecked mariners with kindness, they have been known to take away their means of subsistence. Cruelty to man and beast is often practised to a fearful extent in this favoured country—yea, by many an act of disinterested kindness, will barbarous nations shame the conduct of some civilized Britons. Often is the Samaritan a better neighbour to the poor wounded man, than the priest or Levite.

It is curious to observe how, in this chequered scene of life, judgments and mercies, trials and deliverances, crosses and comforts, are interwoven. In the space of a few hours, Paul was shipwrecked and saved—destitute, and relieved—bitten by a viper, and preserved from injury—judged as a murderer, and honoured as a god. This circumstance of the viper fastening itself upon his hand, was made the means of singling out Paul from the crowd, and presenting him to the inhabitants of the island, as a more than ordinary character. But let us remark how much these people had learned by the light of nature. They knew that there was a superintending Providence; that murder was a sin: and that murderers should be punished: but here their light failed them; for they imagined that all evil doers would be punished before death, and that every sufferer was an evil doer. How thankful should we be, that we are not left to grope after knowledge by the faint rays of unassisted reason, but that we have the full blaze of revelation to light our path, and to correct the errors which the human mind is disposed to embrace. If our privileges in this respect be great, so is our responsibility. "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." †

While Paul remained on the island, many opportunities of usefulness presented themselves to him—the Lord enabling him to perform several miracles of healing, which added weight to his ministerial influence; for, though not recorded, we cannot

* Ch. xxvii. 26. † Luke xii. 48.

suppose that he was three months resident there, without using as much liberty as was allowed him in preaching the Gospel. At length the period for his departure arrived, and he sailed from Malta, laden with tokens of grateful kindness, which the inhabitants heaped upon him. The remainder of his voyage was prosperous. They touched at the island of Sicily, and stayed three days at Syracuse, the capital city. From thence they coasted round, and came opposite to Rhegium, the southernmost part of Italy. They then proceeded to Puteoli, famous for its trade and hot-baths. Here they found some Christians, with whom Paul was allowed to stay seven days. The rest of their way to Rome was by land, from whence the brethren came to meet the apostle and his companions. Some came as far as Appii Forum, about fifty miles from Rome, and some as far as the "Three Taverns," which was about thirty miles. Surely the Lord sent them, and Paul considered it so, for he found increasing confidence from this meeting. Their kind attendance, under such circumstances, afforded him peculiar pleasure. Perhaps he had been depressed in mind; but when he saw the dear brethren to whom he had written his invaluable epistle a few years before,* and over whom he had rejoiced as fellow-heirs of the kingdom, "he thanked God and took courage." Then he feared not the greatest sufferings from the emperor Nero, nor from the malice of all his enemies. Have you ever felt thus refreshed by Christian society? Do you "love the brotherhood," or know any thing of "the communion of saints?" If you have not tasted the sweetness of Christian fellowship, you are to be pitied, as strangers to the most exquisite enjoyment. If you do enjoy that inestimable privilege, labour to improve it for mutual edification and comfort. By your conversation and prayers, endeavour to inspire each other with a holy fortitude, so that you may be possessed of peace and composure, though travelling together, as Paul and his companions were, to meet a powerful and malignant enemy.

* See Rom. i. 7, 12.

CHAP. XXVIII. 16—31.

THOUGH A PRISONER AT ROME, PAUL WAS ABLE TO PREACH TO THE JEWS—DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF HIS PREACHING—HIS COURSE SUBSEQUENT TO THIS BOOK.

And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men *and* brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let *me* go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against *it*, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see *you*, and to speak with *you:* because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *his* lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and *out of* the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

MANY extraordinary circumstances occurred to Paul in the course of this voyage to Rome, but one, more extraordinary still occurred on his arrival there. We are aware that he appealed to the emperor, and that he was conducted a prisoner to Rome. We might, therefore, have been in expectation of his immediate trial, and in deep anxiety for the result of it, But no such thing occurred—no accusers came forward—no

trial took place—and Paul was left for two whole years, to use his unabated zeal in the cause of the Gospel. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord, so vastly beyond our comprehension! Thus, truly, was the promise fulfilled, that he should bear witness to the Gospel at Rome.

Paul was allowed more liberty than the other prisoners, having leave to dwell in a house of his own, under the custody of a soldier, to whom (for some time at least,) it seems probable that he was chained, such being the custom of the Romans towards their prisoners.* Three days after his arrival, he sent for the principal persons among the Jews who resided at Rome, and explained to them the true cause of his imprisonment. They, however, had no unfavourable impressions respecting him to be removed, for none had been made; but they begged his opinion regarding the Christian "sect," as they called it, which was "every where spoken against." Accordingly, a day being appointed for the purpose, they came to his lodging, when, from morning till evening, he expounded and proved the doctrine of the Gospel out of their own Scriptures, and earnestly persuaded them to accept the Saviour. The effect was different, upon different persons; some of them embracing the faith —others rejecting it with contempt—just as it is now. The word of God speaks to men; the ministers of Christ declare his salvation; the truth is applied to the hearts of some by the Spirit; whilst others remain in all the obduracy and unbelief of nature. While they contended among themselves, Paul dismissed them with that prophetic admonition which had, many hundred years before, been given to their fathers.† He told them that they were given up to judicial blindness, and that the consolation which he, in vain, sought amongst them, he should find among the Gentiles, who were ordained of God to inherit those blessings which they despised.

We must not pass over the opinion of these Jews respecting the followers of Christ, without some profitable application to ourselves. They were then "a sect everywhere spoken against;" and though mere nominal Christians have lost this reproach by a conformity with the habits of the world, yet have they no reason to be proud of their loss, for they have thereby lost one great mark of Christ's people, which Paul and his brethren possessed. The *true* members of Christ's church are still every where spoken against. What think you upon this subject?

* Compare verses 16 and 20. † See Isaiah vi. 9.

Do you think that because they are thus marked with the brand of reproach, you should not join yourself to them? Sad indeed is your state, if you entertain such a view; for "if you are ashamed of Christ, he will be ashamed" of you when he comes in his glory. If the circumstance of the Lord's people being universally "evil spoken of," appear *against* them; know that it is greatly *in their favour;* and that if you belong to a party that is *not* evil spoken of by an ungodly world, you are not of the party to which Paul belonged, nor shall you have your portion with him in the eternal world. The time is coming, when they who have most loudly condemned them, shall still more loudly condemn themselves. Beware, then, what sentiments you imbibe respecting the despised "saints," or whatever other name may be scornfully applied to the same class of persons; and offer up, at least, this reasonable petition, that you may be enabled so to think of them here, as you shall do in the eternal world.

And now, before we take leave of Paul, let us see what light his epistles may throw upon the subsequent part of his history, which is not recorded in this book. We learn from it indeed, that for two whole years he was allowed to use the undisturbed exercise of his powers in support of the gospel at Rome; and to the leisure which he then enjoyed are we indebted for his valuable epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and to Philemon. It is probable also, that he revised the Gospel written by St. Luke, as well as this book; since the beloved physician was Paul's companion at this time. Thus, the Spirit employed him, though a prisoner, in preparing food for the church in all ages. His bonds, which, in all human probability, seemed calculated to lessen his usefulness, were, by the overruling providence of God, made instrumental to its increase.*

After the two years here mentioned, it seems probable that Paul was tried, acquitted, and set at liberty, else he would not have spoken of his intention of visiting Judea; † and it is also probable that it is to this, his first trial before Nero, and his acquittal, that he alludes when he says, "at *my first* answer no man stood with me; notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; *and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.*" ‡ With his labours after this release, we are not made acquainted by any inspired record.

* Phil. i. 12, 14. † See Heb. xiii. 23. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

History states that he preached after his first imprisonment in Spain, and even in Great Britain;* that he returned about A.D. 65 to Rome, and met the apostle Peter there. We have reason to believe that both suffered martyrdom under Nero; whose horrible cruelty towards the Christians is well known. All ancient writers seem to agree that Paul was beheaded by the sword about three miles from Rome, whilst Peter was crucified in the city. Thus, these holy apostles, after serving God and edifying his church, were called to join the noble army of martyrs. We dare not give any praise to them, for all they were and all they did, sprung from the power of divine grace; but we should pray, like them to follow Jesus in such decided consecration of ourselves to God, that with them, we may be partakers of the crown of glory, which the Lord shall give to all who love his appearing. May we all so follow their steps, as they followed Christ, that with them we may join the ransomed throng, and ascribe "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Amen.

* See Stillingfleet, Origines Britannicæ, p. 39. and Cave's Lives of the Fathers, Introduction, p. vi.

FORMS OF PRAYER

FOR

FAMILY WORSHIP,

FOR

TWO WEEKS.

☞ The following mark [*] shows where any of the forms of intercession may be intrduced into the prayer for the day.

FIRST WEEK.

SUNDAY MORNING.

O Almighty God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; who hast preserved us all our life long, and brought us to the beginning of this day in safety; we come into thy holy presence, trusting only in the merits and mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

O our God, we acknowledge that we are unworthy even to speak unto thee. We have provoked thee to anger by our sins. We have grievously departed from thee. We have neglected thy word, and profaned thy holy Sabbaths. Yet now, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus, look upon us with compassion; and as thou hast granted us the privilege of another Sabbath, grant us also the light of thy Holy Spirit, that we may worship thee, this day, in spirit, and in truth.

We grieve to think how often we have offered to thee the sacrifice of fools, and drawn near to thee with our lips, while our hearts have been far from thee. Teach us how to pray, we beseech thee. O our Father, give us thy Holy Spirit. Put life and energy into all the services of this day. May we never be content with the mere performance of a lifeless ceremony, but seek to enjoy thy presence in all our privileges. Manifest thyself to our souls. Meet us in thy house of prayer; and so bless and sanctify to us every means of grace, that this day may be to us an earnest of the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

O Lord Jesus, the fountain of mercy, all our happiness comes from thee, for thou hast the words of eternal life. We plead thine own promise. Thou hast said, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary, and I will give you rest." Lord Jesus, we are heavy laden with the burden of sin. To thee we come for rest. Satisfy us with thy loving-kindness. Wash us in the fountain of thy precious blood, and show us the light of thy countenance, that we may rejoice in thee all the days of our lives.

Accept our grateful thanks, O Lord, for all the mercies which we have so undeservedly received: for health, while many around us are suffering from sickness; for food and raiment, while others are in need of both. But, above all, would we bless and praise thee for the gift of thy beloved Son. O that we may this day learn to love him more. May the preach-

ing of the Gospel be accompanied by the power of the Holy Ghost to our hearts. May he be revealed to us in all his glory and beauty, and so shall we enjoy the blessedness of spiritual union with him, our risen Head.

We plead with thee, O Lord, for those to whom thou hast committed the ministry of thy word, and who shall stand up in thy name, this day, to preach the Gospel of thy grace. Do thou break the bread of life, and bless it, and give it into their hands, that they may deal it out to the souls over whom thou hast placed them. Enable them to trust to the teaching of thy Spirit, and not to any strength or wisdom of man. Especially bless him to whom we this day look for instruction; and grant that a word in season may be conveyed to our souls, to quicken us to increased devotedness, and to higher enjoyment of the things of God. Open the treasury of thy grace, O Lord, and satisfy us with thy fulness. Remove every cloud of ignorance and unbelief. May we see thee in the fulness of thy glory; and may we so delight ourselves in thee, that every thing on earth may lose its glory: so shall this Sabbath be to us a blessed foretaste of the joys to come. [*]

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we ask these blessings. For his sake give more than we desire or deserve. And to him, with thyself and the eternal Spirit, be all honour and glory, for ever. AMEN.

SUNDAY EVENING.

O ever-blessed Lord, who hast revealed thyself in the Lord Jesus as a merciful God, able and willing to save them to the uttermost that come unto thee by him, we now draw near in his name.

We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty; provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. We grieve that we have not loved thee with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. Our worship of thee has been marked by infirmity, and defilement has appeared in our holiest acts of devotion. We would fly to the cleansing fountain of the Redeemer's blood, to be washed from the sins of this day. We would lay hold upon his strength, renouncing all self-dependence, and thus receive that blessing from thee, "thou art ready to bestow." We would rejoice that the whole burthen of our sin has been laid upon Jesus, who has made a sin-offering for us. We would look to Him as our advocate, mediator, and atoning priest,—so shall our conscience be eased of the burden of sin, yea, we shall lie down in peace, in the assured hope, that if death should visit us before the morning light, we should be found accepted in Jesus.

We beseech thee, O Lord, to pour upon us the Holy Spirit, and so give effect to thy word which we have this day heard. The seed has been sown in our hearts; but in vain shall we have received it, unless thou follow it with thy blessing. Command the clouds that they so rain upon us, that our hard hearts may be softened; that the seed sown

may be nourished; and that an abundant increase may be produced. Lord, we pray for thy Spirit. Thou hast said, "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Oh! teach us to thirst for the largest supplies of thy heavenly grace. May thy glory be revealed to us, and our hearts rejoice in the possession of thy love. For thee we would live; in thee we would die. Keep us ever near to thee; enable us to walk in the light of thy countenance. Take us into more close and happy union with thyself, and nourish our souls with the bread of life, from day to day.

O Lord, we would remember before thee those who have been engaged this day in the ministry of thy holy word. Strengthen them with the food which they have prepared for others; and enable them to exhibit an example of those precepts which they have laboured to teach. Pardon those who have not faithfully performed the shepherd's office, nor fed thy people with the wholesome doctrines of thy word. O Lord, awaken and convert them, and deliver thy church from all unfaithful ministers. [*]

And now, Lord, we commend ourselves to thy care and keeping. Watch over us during the night. Preserve us from all dangers, both of body and soul. Refresh our weary bodies with needful rest; and if a new day be added to our lives, enable us to show that we have not been forgetful hearers of thy word.

Hear us, for the sake of Him, through whom alone we can expect an answer to our prayers—the Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most justly due, everlasting praise and glory. Amen.

MONDAY MORNING.

Blessed Lord, who hast renewed our lives and thy mercies to us this morning, and hast raised us up to see the light of another day, unto thee do we lift up our souls in prayer. Adored be thy mercy, which has provided a way of acceptance for us, miserable sinners, through the Son of thy love. Adored be that goodness which allows us to come to thee with boldness, and to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. Through him we come to thee, this day—for his sake hear and answer us.

O our God, our iniquities have increased over our heads, and our trespasses have grown up into the heavens. We are ungrateful and rebellious children, but thou art a long-suffering and most merciful Father. O Lord, we would not persist in ingratitude or rebellion. We hate ourselves on account of them; but we are often tied and bound with the chain of our sins, so that we do not follow thee as we desire. We therefore come to thee this morning, pleading thy promise, that thou wilt give thy Holy Spirit to them that ask. Lord, we would ask it, with all our heart and soul. It is only as thou dost endue us with power from on high, that we shall be enabled to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have often laboured, in our own strength, to conquer sin, and have failed. Our flesh cleaveth unto the earth. Though bound to thee by every tie of gratitude, yet our affections are

too often entangled by the things of time. O our Father, have pity upon thy poor weak children, who are struggling to love and serve thee in the midst of a world of iniquity. We earnestly desire to overcome sin, yet have no power in ourselves to do so. But, we bless and praise thee, that thou hast made provision for our wants, and that thou hast promised that thy strength shall be made perfect in our weakness. Lord, endue us with the Holy Spirit, for all the purposes of holiness and growth in grace, for the subduing of the flesh, and enjoyment of spiritual things.

We are now entering upon a new week, and we desire to be more devoted to thee;—to enjoy the hidden life of Jesus;—to war against every thing that may rob us of our peace, or provoke thee to withdraw from us the light of thy countenance. We would live to thy glory, and walk with thee all the day long. But who is sufficient for these things? Lord, *we* are not, but thy Spirit can enable us. Give us, then, the Holy Ghost in all his sustaining power. Make us holy. Stamp thine image upon our hearts, and enable us to manifest the life of godliness. We bless thee for any enjoyment we have had in spiritual things. We praise thee even for the desire to serve thee; and we beseech thee to strengthen us to follow what thou hast taught us to love.

But, O Lord, if there be any amongst us who are yet strangers to these precious truths; do thou have mercy upon them for Jesus Christ's sake. Open their eyes to see their danger. Direct them to the sacrifice for sin, in the blood of Jesus; and the remedy for the love of sin, in the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. [*]

From all the temptations to which we may this day be exposed, good Lord, preserve us. Keep us humble; distrustful of ourselves; but confident of strength in thee. Let us not run into forbidden ways; nor expect protection but in the path of duty. Grant these our petitions, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

MONDAY EVENING.

We come before thee this evening, O gracious Lord, under a consciousness of our sinfulness, and of thine exceeding holiness. Thou art the holy one. Thou canst not bear iniquity. To the cleansing fountain of the Saviour's blood do we come. We would there wash, and be clean; and upon the altar of his merits, we would present this our evening sacrifice of prayer and praise.

Thy goodness has spared us through another day. We come to thee to render an account of our stewardship, and to tell thee how we have this day been engaged in thy service. Lord, thou knowest all our shortcomings before we speak, yet would we make our confession to thee. We are verily guilty before thee. Our own consciences accuse us of having left undone what we might have done; and having done what we should not have done. O our God, our hearts are deceitful above all things. We have not loved thee as we ought. We have too often forgotten thee. We have not kept close to thee. Lord, we cry unto thee

for the Holy Spirit, that we may have that spiritual mind, which is joy and peace. May the Spirit be in us a well of water, springing up into everlasting life; enriching us with the knowledge and love of Jesus; and taking of his glory, and showing it unto us. O Lord, we know that we can have no happiness but in thee. Without the light of thy countenance we can have no peace. Oh! may thy love be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, that our love to thee may be more perfect, engaging our best desires and employing all our powers of mind and body in thy service. Thou didst love us, when we cared not for thee; yea, when, by wicked works, we were thine enemies. O, break thou these hard and flinty hearts, and may every thought, and word, and action, be brought into captivity to thine obedience.

Remove from us all envying, strife, and divisions, and whatever belongs to that carnal mind which is enmity against thee; and grant that the fruits of the Spirit may abound in us, to thy glory, and to our greater joy. Make us humble, and lowly in our own eyes, esteeming others better than ourselves. Enable us to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Strengthen the faith of those who trust in thy name; and give it, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, to those who have it not. Oh! let none of us be self-deceived; may all our hope be founded upon the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Show us our real state and character. Take away every false prop upon which we have leaned, and establish us upon Jesus, the rock of ages—the unfailing foundation of the sinner's hope.

We praise thee, O Lord, for unnumbered mercies, of which we are utterly unworthy. We praise thee, if we have at all been enabled to live to thy glory this day; to resist temptation—to conquer sin—to confess thee before the ungodly—and to warn sinners of the wrath to come. We bless thee that thou hast not given us over to a reprobate mind; nor taken us away in the midst of our iniquities. O, may we now praise thee with unfeigned lips; and may all that is within us bless thy holy name. [*]

Into thy care we commend ourselves, this night. May we lie down in peace with thee and all the world. May our last thoughts be of thee; and when we wake, may thy Spirit bring heavenly things to our mind. Pardon the imperfections of our prayers;—supply what we have omitted to ask for, and do all for the alone merits' sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

TUESDAY MORNING.

Most blessed Lord, who delightest in showing mercy to those who honour thy beloved Son; we renounce all self-dependence, and, trusting to that complete atonement which he has made upon the cross, we come into thy presence this morning.

We humble ourselves before thee on account of our sins. Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives. Thou hast commended thy love to us, in that thou hast given thy Son for our sins; and yet we have requited thy goodness, by ingratitude and rebellion. O

Lord, we hate ourselves on account of sin. We long to be delivered from it. We want that holiness, which is happiness. We feel our utter inability to conquer a single sin. We knock at the door of mercy this morning, and implore of thee to give us a father's blessing. We ask not for riches—for honours—for the good things of this world. We know that these things cannot ease the burdened conscience, nor subdue our corruptions. But we pray of thee to give us the Holy Spirit, to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We would not retain one secret sin, but mortify and resist every unholy thought and desire by the power of the cross of Jesus.

We pray for the mind that was in Christ Jesus; Oh! for more of the life of God in our hearts; Lord, confirm, and strengthen in us whatever thou thyself hast planted; and root out of us all things that offend against the holiness that becomes thy faithful followers.

And, O Lord, look in mercy upon those who are yet unconverted by the Spirit of Christ; who love the world, in preference to thee; and who follow its ways instead of the ways of holiness. Show them their danger and their loss. Convince them that they are in the road that leads to the ruin of their souls. Give them thy Spirit to display to them the love and beauty of the Lord Jesus; that their affections may be withdrawn from unworthy objects, and centred upon him. O adorable Redeemer, so manifest thy love to each of us, that we may esteem thee the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; may our hearts and thoughts dwell upon thee, all the day long.

O Lord, we would praise thee for what we have so undeservedly received. Praise to thee for the blessings of the past night;—that we laid us down to sleep, and were raised in safety. Praise to thee if we begin this day with an increased desire to live to thy glory. If we have it not, give it us before we rise from our knees. Praise be to thee for health, for food, for raiment. But, above all, praise be to thee for the unspeakable gift of thy beloved Son, and for our perfect redemption by him. [*]

And now, Lord, we pray thee to watch over us while we pass through the world this day. Lead us not into temptation—deliver us if tempted. Enable us to glorify thee in our several callings in life. Let nothing so occupy us, as to drive thee from our minds; but be thou ever present, to regulate our tempers, affections, and pursuits. Hear these our prayers, O Lord, and when thou dost hear, forgive, for the sake of him in whom thou art ever well pleased—the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

TUESDAY EVENING.

Blessed be the name of our God, who has safely brought us to the close of this day. We adore thee for thy goodness; and in the name of our gracious Saviour we present ourselves before thee this night. We plead his precious blood for the pardon of sin. We have nothing else to trust to. Praised be thy name for that cleansing fountain which is opened for the chief of sinners. Praised be thy name, that none of us have been cut off in the midst of our iniquities; but that we are still

alive to hear that Jesus is able and willing to save to the uttermost, all that come to God, by Him.

O Lord, increase our faith. Lord, we believe;—help our unbelief. Forgive, whatever thou hast found amiss in us and our services, this day, If we have yielded to temptation—if we have not been watchful over our hearts—if we have spoken unadvisedly with our lips—if we have neglected opportunities of usefulness, good Lord, forgive us.

Gracious Father, we not only desire pardon for the past, but strength for time to come. If another day is added to our lives, enable us to correct what our consciences this night accuse us of. For this purpose, bestow upon us the abundant gift of the Holy Spirit, that we may subdue the corruptions of the flesh, and exhibit the power of godliness, in the life of faith. O Lord, we have too long lived without thee in the world. May the time past suffice us to have wrought the works of sin and folly; and may that which remains of our lives, be wholly and unreservedly thine. The night is far spent—the day is at hand. Enable us to cast away the works of darkness, and to put upon us the armour of light. Give to us increasing desires, for conformity to the life of Jesus. The ways of sin are ways of sorrow. We therefore pray for power over sin. We implore of thee to give us an abundant supply of the Holy Spirit, that we may be numbered amongst thy true children, who hate sin and are zealous of good works. Show us, more and more, the deceitfulness of our own hearts. Enable us to detect the secret motions by which the enemy of our souls prompts us to sin. May we not be ignorant of his devices, nor be led captive by him at his will; but give us the spirit of watchfulness, and strengthen us to avoid the evil we discover.

When we lie down to rest this night, enable us to realize the moment when we shall be stripped of our mortal tabernacle, and enter upon the state beyond the grave. O blessed Lord Jesus, who tasted the bitterness of death, that we might be relieved from its terrors, take from us the sting of death, by showing us that thou hast taken upon thyself our transgressions. Speak peace to our souls, through the blood of thy cross. Give us the assurance of pardoned sin and acceptance; that fear may be completely removed, and that we may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

For the mercies of the past day, accept our grateful thanks. Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with his benefits, even the God of our salvation. Hitherto hast thou blessed us, O Lord. We would raise a token of thanksgiving for the past, and from the experience of thy many mercies, trust thee for time to come. [*]

Into thine arms we now commend ourselves, this night. Watch over us for good. Refresh our bodies with needful rest; and may the strength which we thus receive, be given back to thee in thy service. Hear us, O our God. We speak to thee as children to a parent, for we have boldness to draw near to thee through Jesus. For his sake give us all that we have asked. And may the blessing of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be with us this night, and for evermore. AMEN.

WEDNESDAY MORNING.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts! Thou great first cause; thou author of our being; thou Lord of heaven and earth! How could we have dared to speak to thee, or to raise our eyes to the place where thine honour dwelleth, hadst thou not opened a way of access, through the Lord Jesus Christ! He is our only Saviour. Lord, we disclaim all others; and cling to his cross as the only refuge of our guilty souls.

We grieve to think of our base ingratitude towards thee, who art so worthy of our best affections. We are pained to think what trifles draw our hearts from thee, and how soon they settle upon earthly things. O God, for thy mercy's sake, give us the victory over ourselves. We acknowledge that we are insufficient, of ourselves, to control the passions of our minds. Our hearts are easily taken from thee, though we have charged them to love thee; they too often rove after forbidden objects. We ask deliverance from self. O our Father, hear us; and send the Holy Ghost into our hearts, to reign, and rule, over every thought within. We pray for the full power of the Spirit, to the end that we may subdue self and live more decidedly to thy glory. We desire that the life which we now live, may be by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us. Enable us to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts. We would not spare the most beloved earthly object, that interferes with our devotedness to thee. Lord, we want to be wholly thine. Take from us what thou wilt, except an interest in thy love. O hide not the light of thy blessed countenance, and we shall have bliss, though stripped of every earthly possession. Whom have we in heaven, but thee? Whom, upon earth, shall we desire in comparison of thee? Other lords have had dominion over us: but from henceforth thou shalt be our ALL IN ALL. We make not this promise, O Lord, in our own strength, for we have had painful experience of our helplessness. But we make it in reliance upon thy promise, that thou wilt give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it; he is able to keep the lamp of love alive. Give us freely of the Spirit; purifying our hearts from the dross of earth, and conforming us more fully to the holy image of Jesus. Dispel every cloud of unbelief, and warm our hearts with the beams of thy love. Knit our hearts to thee in a bond that no earthly power can sever; so that we may each be enabled to say—"To me to live is Christ—to die is gain."

We desire to go forth this day as witnesses for Jesus; we would testify for thee by our lives, and by our lips. Give us boldness to overcome the fear of man;—to rebuke sin wherever it appears;—and to exhibit in ourselves the power of thy Spirit to subdue it. Enable us to live this day above the world; and to keep in view the prize of our high calling, in Christ Jesus. May we have deeper acquaintance with our own hearts; and larger manifestations of thy love. [*]

O Lord Jesu Christ, teach us to love the time of thine appearing; and to pray, with all our hearts, that thy kingdom may come, when thy will shall be done on earth, as it is in heaven; when thou shalt

bind Satan, and rule the world in righteousness. May we wait for that day more than they who wait for the morning—may we all look for thy coming in power and great glory.

Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, to the only wise God our Saviour, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, both now, and for ever. AMEN.

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things, we come to present our evening sacrifice before thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thou hast commanded us to pray always, with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit. We desire now to do so. Bestow upon us, we beseech thee, the gift of the Holy Ghost, that we may be enabled to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto thee through Jesus Christ. Let us not be satisfied with the form of worship; may we enjoy it as an unspeakable privilege, thankful to be allowed to make our requests known unto thee; and may we now enter with boldness, into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus.

Another day is gone, O Lord, and we are so much nearer to our eternal home. Thy goodness has followed us this day, and preserved us from many dangers to which we have been exposed. Shall we not praise thee for these things, and acknowledge the hand that has guarded us, and clothed us, and provided for us our necessary food? O, Lord, we would bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world, by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace to enjoy him; and for the hope of glory through his name.

But in vain shall the grace of our Lord Jesus be proclaimed to us in thy word, unless thou remove the scales from our eyes. Give us then the light of the knowledge of thy glory, in the face of Jesus. Remove from our hearts their natural enmity to the things that are spiritual; give us a hungering, and a thirsting, after righteousness. Thou, blessed Jesus, art the bread of life. Satisfy us with thine ownself. We would live upon thee, and grow up into thee, in all things. Show us thy glory, we beseech thee, and so shall we be greatly humbled at our want of likeness to thee. Teach us also to strive for greater conformity to thy mind, that we may be thy true and holy people. We long so to love thee, that we may be content to bear shame, and reproach, and suffering for thy name's sake. May we be crucified to the world. May we lose our relish for every earthly enjoyment, having tasted the higher joy of communion with thee. O, remove every cloud of sin, or unbelief, that would hide thee from our view; and let us dwell in the sunshine of thy love. In thy presence is fulness of joy. Heaven will be perfect happiness, because we shall see thee as thou art. Give us to enter into something of this joy upon earth, by causing us to walk in the light of thy countenance.

O Lord, teach these precious truths to all thy dear children, that they may speak often one to another of thine amazing love, and help each

other forward, as they pass through this wilderness. And to those who love not Jesus, give the grace of conviction. Show them that the world's pleasure is not worthy to be compared with the joy of reconciliation with thee, through the blood of the Lamb; and teach them to look for that glory that is to be revealed, when Jesus shall appear to make up his jewels. [*]

Bless us this night for our Redeemer's name sake. May peace be our portion—the peace that passeth all understanding. Should our rest be disturbed, may our thoughts be fixed on thee; and when we awake, may we still be with thee. Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation; but seal us thine, unto the day of redemption, for Jesus Christ's sake. AMEN.

THURSDAY MORNING.

O thou whose name is Jehovah—the self-existent God, whose creatures we are, and by whose bounty we live; it is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should worship at thy footstool from day to day. We praise thee that thou hast permitted us to do so this morning; that thou hast even provided a way of access to thyself, through the Lord Jesus Christ; and that, by him we may expect to be supplied from thy bounty, with whatever is needful, for time, and for eternity.

We know not, O Lord, what is for our good. We dare not, therefore, ask for any thing temporal, beyond the mere necessaries of life. Give us food and raiment, and make us therewith content. But, Lord, we know that we may ask for spiritual blessings. We therefore beseech thee to bless us with all that our souls require. Give us a deep sense of our own unworthiness. Show us more of the corruption of our own evil hearts, that we may trust them less, and cling to thee for strength to resist their unholy propensities. We confide in the blood of Jesus, for the pardon of all that is past; and we implore a plentiful supply of the Holy Spirit, to shed abroad the love of Jesus in our hearts. Give to us then, thy Holy Spirit;—make us holy;—make us faithful and devoted witnesses for Jesus, in the midst of an ungodly world. O Lord, we wish to manifest in our lives the power of godliness;—to be living epistles, read, and known, of all men;—to exhibit the Spirit's work in subduing our flesh.

Lord, we pray for greater light, and enjoyment in the reading of thy holy word. We would feed upon its precious truths:—love it as the record of our Father's will;—and prefer it to every other study. May we find it profitable, for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness; and may we, by it, be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Grant, Lord, that we may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine, tossed to and fro, in doubt and danger. But may the Spirit lead us to a sound interpretation of thy holy word, so that we may grow up into Christ in all things—being nourished by the sincere milk of the word.

Enable us to walk in wisdom toward them that are without;—to show forbearance in all things; to reprove sin, in the spirit of love; and to

manifest, that while we hate the sin, we are moved by kindness towards those whom we are called to rebuke. Teach us, also, to correct those faults in ourselves, which we discover in others.

Lord, increase our faith, and perfect what is lacking in it, that we may be strong in faith, giving glory to thee. As we have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, enable us so to walk in him, rooted, and built up in him, and established in the faith, as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. We bless thee, gracious Lord, that *we* have heard the sound of the Gospel. O, may our advantages never turn to our greater curse; nor may we be found among those unprofitable servants, who knew their Master's will, but did it not. [*]

Accept our thanks for the blessings of the past night; for peace, protection, and health. Keep us this day in thy faith and fear. May we walk as in thy presence, assured that there is not a thought in our hearts, but thou knowest it altogether; and may we do all things to thy glory.

May the very God of peace sanctify us wholly; and we pray that our whole spirits, souls, and bodies, may be preserved blameless unto the day of the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we then appear with him in glory. We ask all for the same Saviour's sake. AMEN.

THURSDAY EVENING.

Father of all mercies, who hast watched over us during this day, and brought us to the close of it in safety, before we lay ourselves down to take our rest, we would commend our bodies and souls to thy gracious keeping.

Blessed Saviour, through thee we now come to the throne of grace; and, we pray to be cleansed from the defilement which we have contracted in our walk through the world, this day. Blot out as a cloud our transgressions, and as a thick cloud our sins; for we return unto thee, because thou hast redeemed us.

Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord, for in thy sight, shall no flesh living be justified. We do not say that we have no sin, for then should we deceive ourselves; but we confess our sin, and believe that thou art faithful, and just to forgive us all our iniquities. Fulfil thine own promise, and remove from us all that guilt of which our consciences may accuse us this night.

But we not only seek deliverance from the punishment of sin: we most earnestly pray to be freed from its power. The law of sin that is in our members, is our misery. When we would do good, evil is present with us; and the evil that we would not, we have too often done. O Lord, may we long to be delivered from sin. We come to thee, this night, as well for the pardon of the sins of the day, as for strength for the future. If another day is added to our lives, show thy power in enabling us to crucify sin. Send the Holy Ghost into our hearts, that we may be sanctified, body, soul, and spirit. Grant that all carnal affec-

tions may die in us; and that all things, belonging to the Spirit, may live and grow in us.

But thou, Lord, who searches the heart canst alone tell whether we *all* thus hate sin, and thirst for holiness. O, if there be any present who use these words without feeling them; who join in an expression of hatred to sin, yet love it in their hearts, and cannot bear to part with it, in mercy visit them with thy salvation. Create within us all clean hearts, O Lord, and renew right spirits within us. O, give us all one heart, and one mind, and one Spirit; that none, now kneeling before thee, may be wanting amongst the number of thy people; but that our names may be written in the Lamb's book of life.

Bless us, O Lord, in our several stations. Bless those who rule;—and may they never forget that they have a master in Heaven, whose forgiveness they daily need. Bless those who serve, so that they may have respect to the will of God, while obedient to an earthly master; and may every command, agreeable with thy word, be obeyed from the heart. May we, in our respective callings, adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, in all things; and while we bear the name of Christian, may we not contradict it, by the practice of what is hateful to Christ. [*]

Lord, we would be wholly thine. We yield ourselves as clay, into the hands of the potter. Make us holy vessels, meet for our master's use; fill us with the Spirit! Purify, illuminate, and sanctify us—that we may perfect holiness, in the fear of the Lord.

To the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be now ascribed all praise, majesty, and dominion, for ever. Amen.

FRIDAY MORNING.

O Thou who art the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and yet didst humble thyself to undertake the office of Redeemer, and Mediator, for man: we come, through thee, into the Father's presence this morning, to worship in thy name, before the throne of grace.

We laid us down to sleep, and rose in safety, for thou, O Lord didst sustain us. Thou hast permitted us to see the light of another day. O, grant that the day-spring from on high may visit our souls; so that we may all see the Sun of righteousness, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Let none of us be ignorant of the spiritual life of him, into whose name we have been baptized, and whose faith we profess.

Another day thou hast added to our lives, O Lord; and from painful experience of former weakness, we now offer up our prayers to thee, for that strength which will carry us through it in safety. Lord, we look not beyond it; give us *this day*, our daily bread. Thou knowest the temptations to which we are exposed, from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Thou knowest that we live in a world which is at enmity with thee;—that every thing around us is full of the poison of sin, being under the curse; thou knowest, too, that our hearts are carnal, fond of

the world's toys, and prone to choose the evil, and refuse the good. But we rejoice, gracious Lord, that thou knowest our frame—that thou rememberest that we are but dust; and that like as a father pitieth his children, so dost thou pity us. Look then, we beseech thee, upon us, thy poor weak children, who humble ourselves before thee; and implore of thee, for the sake of our only Saviour, to endue us with strength for the work of this day. We have to resist sin in ourselves—to combat it in the world—and to manifest thy power to conquer it. But who is sufficient for these things? But we would trust to the power of thy Holy Spirit. We come with our lamps in our hands to get oil for the wants of the day. Give us largely, and freely, that our light may burn both bright and strong. Let the power of the Holy Spirit be manifested in us. We want no glory for ourselves;—may we seek to be conformed to our master, and therefore content to be despised, so that thou be glorified. O, for the power of the Holy Ghost to rest upon us, that we may be wholly separated from a world that lieth in the wicked one!

Blessed Saviour, we would be like thee. We desire to know the power of thy resurrection, that we may be willing to share thy sufferings, as we hope to share thy glory. We would enter with thee, into the valley of humiliation. We would count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of thee. We would take up our cross and follow thee whithersoever thou goest. Take possession of our hearts; let not our affections wander from thee; bind us to thyself by the strongest cord of love. Let us not lose sight of thee, for the shortest season; but keep us close to thee, in all holy watchfulness. Heavenly Father, put our desires into effect; and enable us to obey the will, which thou thyself hast given. [*]

Bless each individual here before thee. May all whom we love, and all for whom we should pray—may old, and young—may rich and poor amongst us be taught to know the Saviour; and knowing him, to have life through his name.

Hear us, good Lord, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whose only name we offer these our imperfect petitions. Amen.

FRIDAY EVENING.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus. May we prize this hope yet more and more. O, may our hearts rejoice in thy salvation, that in sincerity we may say—whom have we in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that we desire beside thee.

Gracious Lord, thou hast added to our lives another day. And with it manifold privileges and blessings. What shall we render unto thee for all the benefits that we have received from thee: for life and health—for food and raiment—for preservation from a thousand evils—for the means of grace—and above *all*, for the hope of glory through Jesus?

Lord, we have nothing to give, which has not first been received from thee. We can only add to our debt of gratitude, and draw a plea from all thy bounties, to ask thee for more. We pray especially for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to live on Jesus—to be so united to him that we may give up every object which interferes with our devotedness to thee. Enable us, by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, to mortify the flesh, with its affections and lusts; to walk through the world, as our master did, a stranger to all its joys and pleasures, and pursuits. Deliver us from the love of the world. We have promised to renounce it, with its pomps and vanity. But Lord, we cannot do so of ourselves. Give to each of us the Holy Ghost, enduing us with power from on high, planting the love of heavenly things within us, and mortifying our attachment to the things of time. May our old nature be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in us. May we have power, and strength, to have victory, and to triumph against the Devil, the world, and the flesh; and may each day that brings us nearer to our eternal home, find us more weaned from all below, and more united to Christ.

Pardon, O Lord, whatever we have this day been guilty of, whether they be sins of commission or omission. Give us now contrition of heart for offending against thee, make us more watchful over our hearts, should we be spared for another day. Give to us all that godly sorrow which worketh repentance, not to be repented of; and a thorough hatred even of the appearance of evil. Make us a holy people, that thy name may be sanctified in the midst of us. [*]

For the blessings which we enjoy this night, accept our praise and thanksgiving. May we lie down at peace with thee; and may a sense of reconciliation, through the blood of the Lamb, give joy to our hearts. Should death or sickness this night visit us, may every fear be removed, in the confidence of acceptance through Him. Give us that assurance of thy favour, if we have it not; so that they, who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage, may know the glorious liberty, which is to be enjoyed through the Saviour of sinners.

Lord, hear, answer and abundantly bless us, for the sake of thy Son, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SATURDAY MORNING.

O Almighty God, who giveth liberally to all men, and upbraidest not, and does not despise the meanest of thy creatures, who come unto thee in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, hear and answer us, while through him, as the way, the truth, and the life, we come boldly to thy throne of grace.

Thou hast encouraged us to ask for great things, and we desire now to do so; yet not for the things of this world; for its riches—its honours—or its goods, which might prove a curse, instead of a blessing: but we ask for the pardon of daily sin, through the blood of Jesus—for an assurance of thy favour and peace in our souls—for an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we may resist the temptations of the evil one, and manifest in our lives the power of thy grace. Blessed Lord, thou hast encouraged us to expect great things. We acknowledge

that we have not, because we ask not; we have been straightened in ourselves, and not in thee; our conquest over sin might have been greater, had we waited upon thee more for the Spirit. O, then, put into our hearts large desires, and satisfy the same, and give us all that we stand in need of, for the Saviour's sake.

We give thee thanks, O Lord, for thy preservation of us during the night past. We might have perished by fire, or have been visited by the pestilence that walketh in darkness. O, how great is thy goodness to us, when we reflect how many have spent the night in agony of body, or of mind, while we have been kept in health and quietness. Lord, we would praise thee for these things; and as every good gift cometh from thee, we beseech thee to enable us to show forth that praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives.

And now that we enter upon the last day of the week, we would ask the spirit of self-examination; we would revive those days that are gone, and so be humbled to confess, and strengthened to forsake, all that conscience accuses us of. May we remember that this is the preparation of the Sabbath. Make it so to us, we pray thee. Enable us to set our house in order, and so to arrange our worldly business, that we may serve thee, without distraction, on thy holy day.

But forasmuch as we know not what a day may bring forth, O teach us to live this day, as though it were our last: as though we had a certainty of the call of death, or of the Saviour's coming this night. Cut every tie which binds us to earth: overcome our attachment to the things of the world, and enable us to sit completely loose to all but thee. And O, may the roots of our affections strike deeper into the good soil, that being stablished, and grounded in him, we may be proof against the storms of adversity, and the force of temptation. Correct, we beseech thee, whatever thou seest amiss, in our tempers and dispositions. Subdue the risings of unholy passions; say to the ruffled waves, be still; let meekness and humility, prevail over harshness and pride; and may the spirit of the Saviour be manifest in all we say or do. [*]

We pray thee to look upon thy ministering servants, who are to stand up on the morrow to preach the gospel of thy grace. Be with them in their preparation for their holy work. May the Holy Ghost so fill them with the love of Jesus, and the love of souls, that they may fully testify of the riches of redeeming love. Feed their own souls, while they prepare to feed their flocks; and cause that an abundant blessing may follow their labour in the Lord.

Grant these our petitions, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Saviour, and Redeemer. Amen.

SATURDAY EVENING.

O God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive, receive our humble petitions, which we present to thee in the name of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord.

We adore thy holy name, that he, the true Lamb of God offered a sacrifice for us and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Forbid it, gracious Lord, that we should reject so great a benefit, or slight such

wondrous love. Apply to each of us the full virtue of that Saviour's sacrifice. Cause us to rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins, and may we, through him, stand complete in all the will of God.

But, Lord, we confess that we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins: that sin has too often dominion over us, and that we are too often led captive, by Satan, at his will. We implore of thee, for the pitifulness of thy great mercy, to loose us: to deliver us from the love of sin: to give us the spirit to subdue the flesh, and to bring us all into the obedience of Christ. The ways of sins are slavery—thy service is perfect freedom. Make us free, from the dominion of sin, by the power of the Holy Ghost; that we may sanctify the Lord God in our hearts; walk in holiness, and righteousness, all the days of our life, and enjoy the holy liberty of thy children.

We mourn to think how much the things of the world prevail to draw our hearts from thee; what trifles interrupt our communion with thee. O, deliver us from a worldly spirit. Let us feel that this world is not our rest—that it is polluted, and that all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. O Lord, may we be crucified to the world, and the world to us, so that we may serve thee with a single eye, and live for thee alone.

We bless thee, at the remembrance of thine unmerited mercies. We praise thee, that we, who have provoked thee so often to anger, who have grievously sinned and rebelled against thy laws, have not been visited by sudden judgment, and doomed to suffer in the lake of fire. Oh, what a mercy that we have been spared, and not cut off in the midst of our iniquities! We call upon our souls to praise thee, O Lord, and all that is within us to bless thy holy name. Let us not spend that life which thou hast so mercifully spared, on sin or vanity, but take it as thine own. Make us thine. Make us a temple of the Holy Ghost, and reign within us, over every thought, and word, and action.

Look in mercy, O Lord, we pray thee, upon all who are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. Give them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. May thy chastisement yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness in those who are exercised by it.

Have pity, on all prisoners and captives. Lead them to Christ, the all-sufficient Redeemer, who, in his Gospel, proclaims the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Reclaim the backsliders. May they grieve to have forsaken a loving Saviour; and to have preferred before him the wages of iniquity. Put words into their mouths, that they may return and say, "take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." [*]

Forgive us, we beseech thee, the sins of the day—the sins of the week. We would lie down at peace with thee this night; so that if this night our souls should be required of us, we may be found in Jesus—accepted in him, the beloved.

Every prayer we present unto thee in his name—Grant to us needful rest this night; and if we wake to see the Sabbath, may the Spirit meet us with an early blessing, and tune our hearts to sing the praise of our Father, Redeemer, and Comforter, one God, blessed for ever. AMEN.

SECOND WEEK.

SUNDAY MORNING.

O Almighty and eternal God, who hast so loved a guilty world as to give thy Son Jesus Christ to die upon the cross for sinners, we draw near to thee through him, and implore acceptance for the Saviour's sake. O adorable Redeemer, who didst, as on this day, rise from the dead, and triumph over the powers of darkness, we come through thee, our prevailing Advocate, to worship at the throne of grace. O ever-blessed Spirit, whose office is to take of the things of Christ, and to show them to us, be present with us, while we are now engaged in solemn prayer.

We give thee thanks, O eternal Jehovah, for the blessing of another Sabbath :—that we are called away from earthly cares, to spend this day with thee. A day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. But, O Lord, we have spent many Sabbaths without any enjoyment of thee. We have satisfied ourselves with the form, while destitute of the power of godliness. We have made confession of sins, for which we never mourned; and made promises of amendment which we have never kept. We desire that the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought such folly and deceit. We know, Lord, that we cannot enjoy an eternal Sabbath, unless thy Sabbaths on earth be the joy of our heart. We therefore pray, most earnestly, that thou wilt send into our hearts the Holy Spirit, that we may draw near to thee in all the ordinances of this day. Make us hate the sins that caused the sufferings of the Saviour; and adore the love which carried him through them all. O blessed Jesus, as thou didst die, cause sin to die in us; as thou didst rise from death, so make us rise to newness of life. Make us feel that being bought with a price, we are no longer our own, but should glorify thee with our bodies, and our spirits, which are thine. We would make a solemn surrender of ourselves to thee, this day, to do all that thou dost command.

Be with us while we attend thy house of prayer. Solemnize our hearts with a sense of thy presence, and with the manifestation of thy love. Remove from us all wandering of mind and levity of spirit. Let us not do our own ways, nor find our own pleasure, nor speak our own

words, on this holy day: but make it our care to begin, on earth, what we hope to enjoy with thee in heaven. Meet us in private prayer; and enable us to employ part of this day in self-examination, and in the study of thy holy word. If we are employed for the benefit of others, may we remember that thy blessing alone can bless our labours. Prepare our hearts to receive the seed of heavenly truth; and may none of us trifle with the convictions of conscience.

We beseech thee to bless thy servants who are commissioned by thee to preach thy truth this day. Teach them, that they may teach others. May they not trust to the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Cause many to know that thy Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, by leading them to believe its precious truths. May the Holy Spirit so accompany the word preached, that this may be a day of rejoicing to many, by loosing their spiritual bonds, removing their unbelieving fears, and manifesting Christ to their souls in the beauty of holiness. [*]

Lord of the Sabbath, hear our prayers, and may this day be to us a foretaste of eternal rest, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

SUNDAY EVENING.

Most gracious Lord, who hast added to our many mercies the enjoyment of another Sabbath, and hast allowed us, this day, to enjoy so many means of grace through our Lord Jesus Christ; bless us while we now worship thee in his name.

Conscious that we are unable to retain the good seed of thy word, or to bring any fruit to perfection, without the power of the Spirit in our hearts, we, thine unworthy servants, beseech thee now to give that Spirit to us. We have this day had life and death, blessing and cursing laid before us. Teach us to refuse the evil, and to choose the good. Increase whatever convictions may have been forced upon our minds by the truth, and strengthen whatever resolutions we may have formed, of living more devotedly to thee. Grant that the seed sown, may not be taken away by the enemy of our souls. Break our stony hearts, that they may not reject the word of life. Remove the weeds of worldly cares, which would choke the tender blade; and may we bring forth an hundred fold of spiritual fruit, to thy glory.

And while we feel humbled, before thee, under a sense of the imperfection that cleaves to our very best services, we would also praise thee for whatever enjoyment thou hast been pleased to allow us, in the services and ordinances of the day. Praise be to thee if the Saviour has been more precious to us;—thy word more valuable;—sin more exceeding sinful;—and the world less desirable as a place of rest. Praise be to thee if we have felt more as strangers and pilgrims on earth;—if our hearts were more enlarged in communion with thee, and if we have more longed to be free from the body, to enter on a Sabbath of endless delight. Wherein we have failed in this experience, do thou forgive us, and grant that we may have some measure of this blessedness before we

retire to rest; that our souls may not end this day of spiritual feast in deadness to thee; nor suffer hunger, while thy table is spread for our repast. Lord, we are straitened in ourselves, and not in thee. We have not, because we ask not aright. We ask with coldness, when we should cry unto thee with fervent prayer. Pour upon us the Spirit of grace and supplication, that we may pray as we should, and that our souls may be abundantly satisfied with thy loving kindness.

We desire this night, O Lord, to promise before thee, with all solemnity, that, the Spirit being our helper, we will no longer endeavour to serve two masters; but that renouncing the service of the world, and sin, we will take thee as our Master, our Father, and our God. Confirm this resolution. Write it upon the tablet of our hearts. Give us strength to adhere to it, and to renounce all that the world esteems, which stands in the way of our entire surrender to thee. We feel that our souls are of more value than ten thousand worlds; and that nothing here below should be received in exchange for our souls. Give us to feel each day, more deeply, the solemn import of the word—ETERNITY. Give us to sit loose to the trifling things of time. [*]

Again we pray thee, O Lord, to confirm our best resolutions, formed in thy strength. May the power of the Holy Ghost so work within us, that if spared to see another day, we may be enabled to overcome the temptations by which we may be assailed. O, for grace to take up our cross, and follow Jesus, though exposed to opposition for his name's sake! Keep us mindful that it is they who suffer with him here, who shall reign with him in his kingdom; while they who refuse the cross, and deny him, shall be denied before the angels of God.

O Lord, hear us, and abundantly bless us, for Jesus Christ's sake. AMEN.

MONDAY MORNING.

O merciful God, who hast promised that where two or three meet together in thy name, there thou wilt be in the midst of them; fulfil that promise to us, thy waiting people, who come to worship thee this morning, in the name of our adorable Redeemer.

Another day thou hast added to our lives, and dost call upon us to show whether we will be doers of the word which we heard upon the last Sabbath, or whether we have only been forgetful hearers. Lord, the desire of our hearts is, to follow thee fully. But we need the power of thy grace. We are surrounded by temptations, and our own evil heart is the worst of our foes. We implore of thee to take pity on us, and to send the Holy Ghost, to confirm us in the love and practice of godliness. Raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered, in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us.

O blessed Saviour, who endured temptations for our sake, have compassion on us, and pity us in our low estate. Leave us not to walk

alone this day, through the dangers by which we are beset; but be thou with us, that we may lean upon thine almighty arm. Fill us with such love to thee, as will enable us to brave the scorn of the world, in following thy holy will; and teach us to count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of thee. Our business in life is to live to thy glory. While others, who know thee not, are careful and troubled about many things; may the one thing needful occupy the first place in our hearts, this day. Set a watch, O Lord, before our lips, that we offend not with our tongue. Put away from us not only evil speaking, lying, and slandering; but preserve us from the unholy mirth of the world, and from all levity of speech and manner. Give to us that spiritual mind, which is life and peace; and may our great care this day be, to maintain communion with thee.

Make us not only true and just, in all our dealings, but may we be willing to suffer wrong, or take reproach, rather than break the bonds of peace or charity. Enable us to improve every opportunity of usefulness that may occur, either by relieving the needy, or by speaking a word in season. May self be set aside in these blessed duties, and Jesus be our daily example. Grant us, Lord, so to live upon thee, that we may enjoy the prospect of being with thee in glory; may we not be anxious for the possession of those things, which are the objects of the world's ambition. Be thou our portion, and we shall be therewith content. In our respective stations of life, enable us to exhibit the power of godliness; regulating our desires, subduing our natural propensities, and manifesting that we are influenced by love to thee. And as all these things are contrary to the carnal mind, we pray for the power of the Holy Spirit, to work all these works in us, and to conform us to thy holy likeness. [*]

Have pity, O Lord, upon all who are in want and misery. While we are in the enjoyment of plenty, give us a heart to feel for those who suffer from hunger and nakedness; and never let us waste on luxury or vanity, what might relieve the miseries of numbers in our land. Teach us to do to others what we would wish to have done to ourselves.

And now, gracious Lord, we pray thee to be with us through the whole of this day. May we take nothing in hand but what is warranted by thy will and word; and may all we undertake for thy glory, prosper. Grant to us the light of thy countenance, and all will be well. Now to God only wise, be glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY EVENING.

Ever blessed Lord, who requirest those who worship thee, to do so in spirit and in truth, give to us the Holy Spirit, that we may now offer to thee a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable unto thee, through Jesus Christ.

Thou art the Father of light, who hast given us exceeding great and precious promises in the Son of thy love; and as with thee, there is no shadow of turning, we throw ourselves upon those promises, and beseech thee to bestow upon us those perfect gifts, which through him we are entitled to receive, and encouraged to ask.

Yet, Lord, before we name our wants, we would confess our unworthi-

ness of the least of thy mercies. We would humble ourselves before thee. To us belong shame and confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee. Behold, we are vile—our nature is corrupt, and we have provoked thee to anger by our multiplied transgressions. Have mercy upon us, O God, we beseech thee. Pardon and deliver us from all our offences. Accept us in thy beloved Son. Look upon the face of thine anointed. Wash us in his blood and we shall be clean; cleanse us, and we shall be whiter than show: may we now be washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God; and may we hereafter be presented spotless before thy presence, with exceeding joy.

O, how great is the sum of all thy mercies to us! Lord, we can neither number them, nor the acts of our own ingratitude. But give to us now, we pray thee, such a sense of the love of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may be drawn from the love of earthly things, to the enjoyment of thee. We look on sin as our enemy. Destroy our enemy, we pray thee. Mortify sin in our members; that all things belonging to the flesh may die in us; and that all things belonging to the spirit, may live and grow in us; that we may be separate from the world, and dedicated to thee.

We pray thee to enable us so to regulate our worldly affairs, that we may serve thee without distraction; while we fill our stations in life, may it ever appear that we are more actuated by a desire for thy glory, than by the love of the world. Take from our hearts the love of money, which thou hast declared to be the root of all evil; and may we gladly relieve the wants of the poor and needy. Subdue our hateful pride. Make us lowly in our own eyes, esteeming others better than ourselves. May our minds be kept so continually in a heavenly frame, that our speech may be always with grace, seasoned with salt. Remove from amongst us that levity of conversation, which belongs to the children of the world; and teach us rather to love that which is profitable, for the use of edifying, and which may minister grace to the hearers.

May Christ be formed within us, the hope of glory; and may our affections be weaned from a world which lieth in the wicked one. Do thou, blessed Lord, cut the roots which strike so deeply into earth: and make us free for the service and enjoyment of thy kingdom. Give us spiritual minds. Teach us more and more to be conformed to the rule of thy word, and to the holy image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. [*]

And now, Lord, that we are about to retire to rest, we beseech thee to be about our bed, as thou hast been about our path this day. Let no harm come nigh our dwelling, nor let any evil thoughts disturb the peace of our minds. Keep us mindful, that ere long we may sleep the sleep of death; and so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be now, and ever, acceptable unto thee, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus, our strength and our Redeemer. AMEN.

TUESDAY MORNING.

O Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day, look with pity on those here assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, to worship at thy throne of grace.

Thou hast mercifully answered the prayers which we offered up on the last evening :—thou hast preserved us from the perils and dangers of the night, and we are here to thank thee for thy mercy. But, gracious Lord, we need a continuance of that mercy, from day to day. We cannot walk this day, in the strength of yesterday. We are dependant on thee for every thing ; make us content to be so, that thou mayest have all the glory. Hear us now, for the sake of Jesus, while we renew our petitions, and make our requests known unto thee.

Blessed Lord, we need supplies both for our bodies, and for our souls. We ask thee, then, as regards the things of life, to give what is required to preserve our bodies in health, for thy service. We covet no luxuries, nor any thing to gratify the desires of our fallen nature. Give us food and raiment, as thou seest fit : and teach us to be therewith content. For our souls we now desire spiritual food. O, that we hungered less for the meat that perishes, and more for that which endureth unto everlasting life ! Give that hungering and thirsting after righteousness, to those amongst us, who may not have it ; and satisfy the desires of those within whom thou hast already created it. May we feed on the bread of life. Blessed Lord, give us a large supply, that we may love and praise thee.

O ever gracious Saviour, come thou and take possession of our hearts. Cause us to feel the power of thy love. We would be crucified with thee, to all the things of time and sense. We would enter into the valley of humiliation with thee. We would have our will so subject unto thine, as to lose all will of our own, that thou alone mayest be glorified. We would mortify self, that thou alone mayest live within us. We would live to thy glory, and cut off every indulgence which interferes with our enjoyment of thee. We would determine to know nothing on earth, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

And thou, O Holy Ghost the Comforter, whose office it is to create these desires within us, fill us with thy mighty power, and strengthen us to accomplish, what thou dost teach us to approve. Be in us a Spirit of holiness—a Spirit of humility—a Spirit of boldness in the cause of Christ.

O Almighty God, Father, Son, and Spirit, accept our grateful but imperfect thanksgiving for all thine inestimable benefits. And teach us, we pray thee, to love that holy word which reveals thy truth to us. We grieve to think how often we neglect it—how often we read it with carelessness—how often we prefer the words of man. Give us the Spirit to see its hidden treasures, that we may read it, not by constraint, but with the joy of those whose souls are enriched by its store. And cause, O Lord, we pray thee, that it may be known and valued, through the dark

places of our land. Have mercy on those who would interfere to check the progress of thy word. Give them to see the danger of fighting against God; and reveal to them the knowledge of that truth, which will turn their enmity into zeal for thy glory. [*]

Now to thee, the Almighty God, who art able to keep us from falling, with the adorable Redeemer, and the ever-blessed Spirit, three persons in one God, be ascribed everlasting praise, by us on earth, as by all in heaven. AMEN.

TUESDAY EVENING.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Father of all mercies, who hast shown thy love to a guilty world, by sending Jesus our Lord to be the Saviour of sinners; look with pity, we pray thee, upon us thy unworthy servants, who present ourselves before thee, to offer our evening sacrifice of prayer and praise.

Lord, we dare not have hoped for acceptance, hadst thou not assured us of thy willingness to receive us. Thou art a God of perfect holiness, and we are creatures of iniquity and rebellion. Yet hast thou commended thy love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;—the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to thee. But, gracious Lord, our own rebellious hearts would have refused the favour of thy love, hadst thou not overcome their hatred to holiness. Breathe, still more, into our souls, the breath of a new and living principle, causing the death of our carnal desires, and quickening us to all the power of godliness. We want not merely to know thy truth;—we would feel it and practise it. To will is present with us, but how to perform that which is good, we know not. Grant to us the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, we pray thee, and may he be in us—the instructor in righteousness—and the revealer of Christ.

Lord, we are but babes in spiritual knowledge. We desire to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Deliver us, then, from all spiritual indolence—from the pampering of the flesh, and from the love of ease, which tend to quench thy Holy Spirit. May we never forget that we are in an enemy's country, and that we should endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Enable us to practice self-denial—to keep our bodies under, and bring them into subjection. Give us strength to obey the dictates of our conscience, and to follow that way, at any cost or sacrifice, which thy word declares to be right. Remove the evil tempers of our hearts; that neither anger, malice, revenge, nor uncharitableness, may appear in us, who call ourselves the followers of the meek and forgiving Saviour. Teach us the value of time, we pray thee, that we may never waste that precious talent, nor employ in useless pursuits or conversation, those moments for which we shall be called to give account.

O our God, we yield thee our hearty thanks, that thou hast dealt so mercifully with us; that thou didst spare us when we deserved punishment; that thou didst not cut us off in the midst of our iniquities,

while the load of unpardoned sin lay heavy upon us, and when our souls, had they been called to thy bar, must have been doomed to most merited punishment. Look upon us now, we pray thee; and if any now kneeling in thy presence are yet careless about the things that belong to their peace, O pity them, convert, and sanctify them. Draw them to the cleansing fountain of a Saviour's blood, for the removal of past guilt, and supply them with the Spirit's power, to sanctify them for the time to come. [*]

Again, O Lord, do we look for thy protection during another night. Make us thankful that we are not exposed to the sufferings which many endure, from cold and nakedness. Who are we, that we should be protected, while others perish through want? O give us hearts to feel for the miseries of others, and to deny ourselves, that we may contribute to their relief. Hear and answer our prayers, O Lord our God, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

WEDNESDAY MORNING.

O most mighty God, who receivest the adoration of the heavenly host, and art yet willing, for the sake of Jesus, to welcome even sinners such as we are, who come to thee in his name; hear us while we draw near to thee in him, and present this our morning sacrifice.

We thank thee for the protection of the past night. We thank thee that we were allowed to lie down in peace, and to awake in safety. O, what cause have we to praise thee, when we consider the miseries to which some of our fellow-creatures have been exposed, and from which we have been preserved! How many were in want and wretchedness during the past night, while we were in ease and comfort! How many lay upon beds of sickness, racked with pain and torture, while we were in the enjoyment of refreshing sleep! How many suddenly called away, are now lifting up their eyes in torments: and yet we, who have often slighted the message of thy love, are spared to hear that the door of mercy is still open—Jesus still waits to be gracious—there is still pardon through his precious blood. Oh, that this may be to us the accepted time—the day of our salvation.

Praised be the Lord God, for his unnumbered and unmerited mercies! Let all that is within us praise his holy name. Where should we now have been, had death visited us during the last night? Lord, thou knowest: our consciences know likewise. Make any of us, we pray thee, who may feel that they are still unprepared to die, dread to spend another day without pardon through a Saviour's blood. Thou art more willing to give than we are to ask. Lord, lead us all to Jesus, that those who have known him not, may this day be made acquainted with him as an all-sufficient Saviour; and that they who have, may know him still more perfectly.

Pour upon us an abundant measure of the Holy Ghost. Open the windows of heaven, and rain down upon us a gracious shower from above. Cause that the wilderness within, may be turned into the garden of the Lord. O our God, make us holy: wean us from sin: enable us

to forsake the world and its ways, and to follow Jesus in the narrow way that leads to eternal life. We grieve to think that we should have found pleasure in those sins which caused the sufferings of the Son of God. May we hate them for the future, and may the love of holiness be so planted in our hearts, that we may find more pleasure in its ways, than we ever had in the ways of carnal enjoyment.

May we all be filled with love to thee, and be conformed to the precepts of thy holy word. Lord, thou hast given us many talents, to employ in thy service. Make us faithful stewards. Enable us to trust thee for food and raiment, which thou hast pledged thyself to provide; and may we not distrust thee, nor disobey thee, by laying up treasures on the earth. Be thou our treasure, from day to day; then, where our treasure is, will our hearts be also; and our *all* shall be devoted to thy service. [*]

Blessed Saviour, we know not how soon thou mayest appear, to take account of thy servants. Keep us each day, each hour, in unwearied watchfulness; and so let us live in thy presence, that we may rejoice at the prospect of thine appearing.

All our prayers and praises we present unto thee, O Lord, in the name of him, through whom alone thou wilt accept us—the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

Father of all mercies—the author of our being—the source of our every hope, joy, and comfort, whose goodness has preserved us through another day, behold us here before thee, this night, and enable us to worship thee, in spirit and in truth.

We are conscious of manifold transgressions, and unnumbered sins. Thou art all love to us, and we are all ingratitude towards thee. Look not at us, as we are, stained with sin: but look at us in the face of thine anointed. We fly to that Saviour, who is our only refuge, and through him, we are able to appear before thee with holy boldness. Hear us, for his sake, we humbly beseech thee, and give to us all the blessings which we are allowed to ask in his name.

We would make further confession of our sins, O Lord. We have erred and strayed from thee, like lost sheep. We willingly departed from thee: we desired not the knowledge of thy ways. But in ignorance we have done all this. We believed not that thy ways were ways of pleasantness, and all thy paths peace; we believed not that holiness was happiness. We have tried the pleasures of the world, and found them wanting; we acknowledge that we have never enjoyed an hour's peace in the way of sin. O thou much-offended Father, we turn unto thee. Thou mightest justly spurn us from thy presence, to reap the fruit of our deserving. But thou art God, and not man, therefore we are not consumed—we now return to thee, and say, Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord; pardon all iniquity, and receive us graciously, for the sake of thy beloved Son. O our God, we disclaim

every idea of acceptance now, or ever, except through the blood of the Lord Jesus. We have no merits or righteousness to plead; we cling to the cross of Jesus, as our only refuge from the wrath to come.

And now, Lord, our desire is to serve thee more devotedly, for the rest of our days. We desire to redeem the time that remains, from every unhallowed pursuit;—yea, from every thing which may not be consistent with the health of our souls. We would spare nothing, however dear to us—however pleasing to flesh and blood, which thy word condemns, or which interferes with our growth in spiritual life; yea, Lord, whatever has even the appearance of evil, we would most cheerfully sacrifice, lest we may cause a weaker brother to offend, or bring discredit upon the service of our God.

And now, Lord, while we praise and bless thee for what thou hast done, we would pray thee to be with us for all that yet lies before us? Make thy way plain before our face. O, that our way was made so direct, that we might keep thy statutes! Open Thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law. With our whole heart would we seek thee; let us not wander from thy commandments.

To thy protection, O Lord, we this night commend ourselves. Keep us in safety, both of body and soul, and seal us with the Holy Ghost, unto the day of Redemption, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

THURSDAY MORNING.

O ever blessed Lord, who art good and gracious to unthankful sinners;—who dost not measure thy blessings by our deservings, but according to the multitude of thy mercies, dost give us all things that pertain to life and godliness, hear us, while in the name of Jesus we present ourselves before thee, this morning, to draw out of his fulness, all needful strength for the wants of this day.

Lord, we are poor, and miserable, and weak, and helpless creatures. We have no sufficiency of our own; not even to think a good thought. Our sufficiency is all of Christ. We praise thee, blessed Saviour, that what we have not, thou hast for us;—that while we are nothing, we are complete in Thee.

O our God, give us thy Holy Spirit, to open to us the treasures of thy holy word;—to unfold to us the glories of the Saviour;—to reveal to us what the natural mind cannot understand. May our souls be athirst for Thee, the living God. Satisfy us with thyself, and make us feel, from happy experience, that thou art a sufficient portion.

Blessed Lord, thou hast said that thy ways are pleasantness, and all thy paths are peace. May we always know this from our own enjoyment. We wish to be dead to the world, and to walk in those ways of pleasantness. Direct our steps, we pray thee. May thy Spirit's teaching dispel the darkness of our minds, and reveal to us the glory of Jesus. O, Thou who hast said, "Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden; and I will give you rest," receive us who throw ourselves upon that promise, and come unto thee now, for rest from sin, and rest in thee. Do thou render us, and our services, acceptable unto the Father;

we know that all power, in heaven and earth, is given unto thee; bestow therefore upon us the power of the Spirit, which thou hast received for the Church.

And, O Lord Jesus, we beseech thee to look with compassion upon the members of thy mystical body here on earth. We mourn over the divisions, and distractions, which separate those who should be united in the bonds of the Gospel. Have pity upon thy Church; and send forth thy Spirit, to lead thy servants into all truth. May thy people again be of one mind and one spirit, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. We acknowledge that too many seek their own things, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's. Revive the spirit of Christian love amongst us. Clothe thy members with the garments of holiness; and cause them to hold forth the word of life;—and so to shine as lights in the world.

Visit the dark places of the earth with thy salvation. Direct the hearts of thy faithful servants, to preach thy truth in the love of it, to those who are sitting in the shadow of death. Gather in the number of thine elect, and hasten thy kingdom, O Lord, when thy will shall be done on earth, as it now is in heaven. [*]

Accept our praises, O Lord, for unnumbered mercies. Praise to thee, for food, raiment, health, and strength. Praise to thee, that we are not with those who are delivered to chains of darkness, reserved unto the judgment of the great day. Praise to thee, for the unspeakable gift of thy Son, Jesus.

And now, to thee, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all praise ascribed, by us on earth, as by all in heaven, for ever. AMEN.

THURSDAY EVENING.

O thou whose name is Jehovah, who art the most high over all the earth, and who requirest that all who worship thee, should do so in spirit and in truth, give us grace, we pray thee, to present a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to thee through Jesus Christ. Drive earthly thoughts and cares, from our minds, while we now come to worship thee. Make us feel that we are speaking to the eternal God; and cause the light of thy countenance to shine upon us, that this may not be a service of constraint, but the happy service of our hearts.

O, blessed Lord, we mourn to think how much we lose, by keeping at a distance from thee. Thou art all love, and compassion, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thou hast treasured up, in Him, all that our souls can want, for salvation and for spiritual enjoyment. Thou hast made him head over all things to the Church; and hast committed all power in heaven and earth, to him. Lord, we acknowledge that we have not, because we ask not;—that we are straitened in ourselves and not in thee. We praise thee, we bless thee, we give thanks to thee, at the remembrance of thy loving-kindness, and we acknowledge that the guilt is all our own;—that we are left without excuse:—that thou wouldst be justified in our condemnation this night. Yet, O Lord, spare us, though we deserve punishment. Enter not into judgment with thy

servants; but send the Holy Ghost into our hearts, to subdue our carnal desires and affections; and so to manifest to us the love of Christ, that we may cleave unto him alone.

Oh! our God, we have often robbed ourselves of spiritual joy. We have lived at too great a distance from thee—our joy has been too much drawn from the things of time. We desire that the time past may suffice us to have wrought such folly. We desire now, to take thee as our portion; to seek our joy in thee alone; to be crucified to the world, and that the world should be crucified to us. Send us, therefore, the Holy Ghost in abundant measure, that the love of sin may be mortified within us, and that such a hungering for spiritual things may be created within us, as shall be satisfied with nothing but the fulness of our God.

Thy love to us, O Lord, is very great. Thou hast manifested it, in the gift of thy Son, for the sin of the world. O give us now, we pray thee, the Spirit to receive him, enjoy him, and delight in him. Lord, we ask nothing relating to this life, beyond the needful wants of food and raiment. But we ask for all those spiritual gifts, which thou hast promised. Increase our faith an hundred fold; and then, according to our faith, give thou unto us. Keep us mindful that this world is not our rest. Remove every lingering affection that would cling to the enjoyments of earth; and so display to us the glory of the coming kingdom of our Lord, that our desires may be raised above the things of time. [*]

And now, O our Lord, be with us this night, we pray thee. Allow us to enjoy thy presence, in private prayer, before we retire to rest; that we may lie down under a sense of thy watchfulness and love; and if it be thy will that we should see another day, may that day be spent in thy service. We ask all, for the sake of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.

FRIDAY MORNING.

Most gracious God, whom angels worship with unwearied service, much more shall we adore thee, for the gift of thy Son, Jesus Christ. Thanks be unto thee, O Lord, for this, thine unspeakable gift. May all that is within us, bless and praise thy holy name.

Blessed Lord, thou hast manifested thy love to a guilty world; thou hast proved thy willingness to receive those who have rebelled against thee, but now return to thee, in faith and penitence. We come unto thee in our Saviour's great and prevailing name. We make mention of his righteousness, and that only. We make full confession of our guilt. We stand condemned—yea, self-condemned, by reason of sin. We have nothing to plead, but thy love and mercy, through Jesus. Hear us, we beseech thee, while in this, thine own appointed way, we now draw near to thee.

Thou hast preserved us through another night, and thou hast brought us to see another day; a day to be employed in thy service. But, O Lord, we cannot live for thee, unless thou dost live in us. Our flesh

cleaveth unto the earth. We are by nature carnal; and the things of the world have power to seduce our hearts, when the things of thine eternal glory are too often forgotten.

Under the consciousness of our weakness, we cry unto thee, for the mighty power of the Spirit; enable us to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts; and raise us to the enjoyment of spiritual things. Give us an abiding view of heavenly things, O Lord. May thy Holy Spirit reveal them to our hearts—may He manifest to us the exceeding great love of Jesus, that we may be constrained to make a more entire surrender of ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to thy service. Lord, thou art worthy of more than we can give; but give us hearts to rejoice in the consecration of all we possess to thy service. O, that we could love thee more, and serve thee better! So should our joy be increased; and so wouldst thou honour us, as instruments of usefulness in thy service.

We come to thee now, O Lord, to seek strength for the wants of the day. We can do much for thee, if thou dost give us willing minds. We can redeem the time, from worldly pursuits, to be employed for thee, and with thee; we can deny ourselves carnal enjoyment, if thou dost give us power from on high. Give it to us, then, O Lord, we implore thee, that we may this day manifest the power of godliness and bear witness for thee, by the testimony of our lips and of our lives.

Enable us so to see the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus, that we may count all things but loss for his sake; and forsake all, to take up our cross and follow him. May we glory in the cross, and count it all joy, if, for the sake of Jesus, we fall into divers tribulations. Lord, we would live as strangers and pilgrims on earth; we pray of thee to enable us to deny ourselves all carnal indulgence, which wars against the mind of the Spirit. Let us not desire to imitate the practice of a world that is at enmity with thee; but may we rather study to be conformed to the image of the Saviour's holiness. [*]

We prostrate our souls before the throne, and worship thee, O Lord, saying, Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto thee, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.

FRIDAY EVENING.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, whose we are, and whom we ought to serve; whom to know is life eternal, and whom to obey is perfect freedom; we adore thy majesty, as we are allowed to see thee, in the face of Jesus Christ.

We are sinful and rebellious creatures, and thou art a consuming fire. But eternal praise be to thy wisdom, which provided a way whereby thou couldst be a just God, and yet a Saviour. We praise, and bless thee, for the Gospel, which reveals thy love to us in Jesus; that thou hast laid help upon One that is mighty; that thou hast delivered us from going down to the pit, because thou hast found a ransom. Accept us, this night, in thy beloved Son, the Lord our righteousness. We would take

hold of his salvation, and stand before thee in our substitute; we rejoice, that in him we can be justified from all things; that in Him thou art a God of love. May the Holy Ghost shed abroad in our hearts the love of thy name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and keep us in the same for ever and ever.

O Lord, it is pain and grief to us, that we do not serve thee better. Our hearts are too often charged with the care and occupation of earthly things. Our flesh cleaveth to the earth; and our affections stray away from thee, whom we have charged them to love. O our God, have compassion upon us, while we are struggling against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Leave us not in our own strength, to contend with spiritual wickedness, in high places; but let thy strength be made perfect in our weakness. Put upon us thy heavenly armour. Endue us with power from on high, that we may be refined from the dross of earthly-mindedness, and be purified to serve thee, in spirit and in truth. O ever precious Saviour, our great High Priest, our advocate with the Father, plead thou our cause, and supply all spiritual blessings, for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls. All that we can desire is treasured up in thee. Give us whatever we need, for thy service, and for the enjoyment of heavenly things; so that we shall be neither barren, nor unfruitful, in the work of our God.

And bless thy mourning Church, O Lord, which suffers from deadness and division; grant a fuller measure of the Comforter's presence. O, heal the wounds which sin and selfishness have inflicted upon thy members. Cause thy way to be known upon earth. Make it plain how thy servants should serve thee. Leave us not in doubt, in those things which make for our peace. May we in sincerity of heart, look to thee for direction; let the pillar and the cloud go before us. O Lord, rouse thy slumbering servants amongst us, and make them ready for the bridegroom's coming. Give us oil in our lamps, and so wean our hearts from all worldly things, that we may be ready, at any moment, to go forth when the cry shall be heard, "Behold the bridegroom cometh." Give to us all that preparedness of heart, that in the hour when alarm shall seize the most stout-hearted of sinners, we may be enabled to rejoice at the sign of the Son of Man, and hasten to meet him.

If there be any present, O Lord, who could not welcome the advent of Jesus, enable them soon to do so. Prepare their hearts to obey the Gospel of thy grace. Give them faith in Jesus, as a Saviour, and the Spirit of adoption, to call thee, Abba, Father. O curse not the barren fig-trees, but spare them yet a little longer, and supply that Spirit, which will cause them to bring forth fruit to thy glory. [*]

Let these, our petitions be heard, and answered by thee, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

SATURDAY MORNING.

O Lord God, our Creator and preserver, who hast brought us into being, and sustained us all our life long, though unworthy of the least of thy mercies, we praise thee for the blessings of this life. But above

all, would we adore thee for the manifestation of thy love to a guilty world, in the gift of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

We come before thee, O Lord, to receive those spiritual gifts, which thy love has provided, and which are treasured up in Jesus. We would hunger and thirst after righteousness; feed us, this morning, with the bread of life; satisfy our thirst from the stream of the Spirit; and in the strength of this heavenly portion, will we go forth on our journey this day.

Blessed Lord, thou knowest that this world can afford no food for the soul. We travel through a wilderness, and yet we are too often contented here, as though this were our place of rest. Lord, suffer us not so to be. Oh, may no earthly things tempt our hearts from thee; may we be weaned from this world; may our affections be set on the things above, where Christ sitteth at thy right hand.

O, our God, we are often weary by reason of sin. All that belongs to us is unclean. Our evil hearts give us unceasing pain, and demand unceasing watchfulness. Grant us, then, the Almighty Spirit, to sustain us in the spiritual warfare and to keep eternal things in constant view before our minds. We would adorn the doctrine of Christ, in all things. We would display the power of the Holy Ghost in subduing sin, conquering our unruly and unholy tempers, and producing within us the meekness and gentleness of Jesus. Grant us that chastened temper, which ever yields to the influence of love; and displays itself in the spirit of love, in all we do, or say. We ask not for worldly things, O Lord. Feed us with food convenient for us; be thou our portion, and we ask no more.

We pray thee, Lord, to give us a greater knowledge of ourselves. Our hearts are deceitful, as well as desperately wicked. Leave us not in doubt, or ignorance, as to our real state in thy sight. May we never think too highly of ourselves, nor yet be deceived with a name to live, without enjoying the power of true godliness. O work in each of us that needful change of heart, which will make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. May we all be born again of the Spirit; and may we be made full partakers of the divine nature.

Enable us, O Lord, to make full proof of thy promised presence. Teach us to walk after the example of Jesus; to live as strangers and pilgrims upon earth; to deny ourselves the enjoyment of earthly things, that we may have to give to those who are in need. Give us tender consciences, awake to every danger that might disturb the peace of our souls. Manifest thy glory to us, that being dead to this world, we may live upon the enjoyment of the hidden life of Jesus, and the assured hope of eternal life through his name. May our hearts be with our treasure, in heaven, and may our conversation be of heavenly things. [*]

Preserve us, this day, we beseech thee, from the evils of the world through which we pass. May we walk, as separate from its pleasures and pursuits, and choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Keep us mindful that this day is the preparation of the Sabbath; so that no worldly care or business may be allowed to interfere with the day of sacred rest. Hear us, answer us, and bless us, for the sake of him, through whom thou canst receive us with acceptance, the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

SATURDAY EVENING.

At the close of another day, and of another week, we come before thee, O Lord, to present our prayers and praises, in the name of Jesus.

Much have we to praise thee for, and much to ask from thee. We praise thee for protection and preservation; for the blessings of thy watchful providence, and for freedom from sickness, suffering and want. Or, if any of us have been called to endure these things, we praise thee that we have not suffered as we deserved, but that thy judgments have been tempered with love. O, how great is thy love to us! What could have been done for us, that thou hast not done, O Lord? And yet have we been rebellious and ungrateful! Break our hard and stony hearts, we pray thee. O, for hearts to love thee, and praise thee, and serve thee as we ought! Our sin is our misery. For the sake of the Lord Jesus, make us holy and spiritual—and quicken us in every office of love to thee. Send us the Holy Ghost, we pray thee, in such measure as will subdue our carnal affections, and bring us into obedience to thee; whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, may we do all to thy glory. Relieve our minds from all carefulness about the things of this world, and may the desire of our souls be, to glorify thee, to live in the light of thy countenance, and to be witnesses for Christ in a world of sin.

Teach us to praise thee, O our God. Put a new song into our mouths, even a song of thanksgiving unto thee. So satisfy us with the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ, that all that is within us shall bless thy holy name, and rejoice in the hope of thy glory. Give us grace to wait upon thee, to know thy will, and patience to follow it. Teach us thy way, O Lord. Make the path of duty plain before our face. Leave us not in doubt, we beseech thee, nor allow us to lean to our own desires. We groan, being burdened with a body of sin. Our flesh lusteth against the spirit. Give us, we implore thee, the mind and courage of faithful soldiers. Enable us to fight against our spiritual enemies; endue us with strength for the battle. May our flesh be subdued to the Spirit, that thy name may have all the glory, and we the enjoyment of the reign of grace within. [*]

We pray of thee, gracious Lord, to prepare our hearts for thy service on the approaching Sabbath, if it be thy will that we should be spared to see it. Enable us this night to lay aside all worldly care and occupation, that the things of earth may not be mixed with the service of heaven. Teach thy servants whom thou hast called to the ministry of thy word, that they may teach others the saving truths of the Gospel of Christ. And, O, may our lives be a preparation for that eternal sabbath that remains for the people of God. For thee may we live, and with thee may we die. And do thou so reveal to us the Saviour's approaching glory, that we may even hasten unto the coming of the day of God.

O Lord, pity our weakness, and raise us from our low estate. Let that love which gave Jesus for us, give us all spiritual blessings for his sake. Thy children ask for bread; they cry unto thee, their Father. Give us,

then, a large blessing, and satisfy us from that plentiful table which thou hast spread for our wants.

Not for our worthiness' sake do we ask these things, O Lord, but for the sake of Jesus, who alone is worthy. To him, with thyself and the Holy Spirit, be everlasting praise. AMEN.

SHORT FORMS

FOR PARTICULAR OCCASIONS,

TO BE ADDED TO THE PRAYER FOR THE DAY.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

O Lord, we have much to praise thee for. But, above all, would we bless thee for the gift of thy Son, Jesus, whose birth into our world, "in the likeness of sinful flesh," we this day celebrate. We adore thee, O Father, for manifesting thy love to us in such a wonderful manner. We adore thee, O ever-blessed Lord Jesus, that thou didst leave the Father's glory, to live and die for sinners. Dwell in us we beseech thee, by the power of the Spirit, that we may live and die in thee. And as thou didst despise the grandeur of this world, and the pomp of this life, grant us so to find our joy in thee, that we may follow the example of thy great humility.

We present before thee this morning, O precious Saviour, not gold, nor frankincense, nor myrrh; but ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice. We praise thee that thou didst visit this earth in mercy, to satisfy the justice of our offended God. O prepare us for thy second coming in glory, when thou shalt not be seen in suffering flesh, but appear to reign in triumph and great majesty.

GOOD FRIDAY.

O blessed Lord Jesus, who didst, as on this day, suffer death upon the cross, the just instead of the unjust, that thou mightest bring sinners unto God, hear us, now that thou art crowned with glory and honour. All power in heaven and earth is given unto thee. May we, by spiritual union, feel thy sufferings, and enter into thy death. Bestow on us the gift of the Holy Ghost, that sin may be crucified within us; that we may be dead to the world, and the world to us. We rejoice that thou hast nailed our sins to thy cross, O gracious Saviour. Dwell

in us, we pray thee, and we shall be content to endure shame and suffering with thee. By thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, O adorable Redeemer, deliver us from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and enable us to live for thee alone.

EASTER SUNDAY.

O thou crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus, who didst, as on this day, conquer death, and overcome him that had the power of death—who didst rise from the grave and lead captivity captive, hear us we beseech thee. Quicken any who are yet in the grave of an unconverted state. Speak to the souls that are dead in sin, and they shall live. And O, give, we pray thee, to thy servants that power of the Holy Ghost which thou art exalted to bestow. May we live thy risen life, and be partakers of the glory that is about to be revealed. Raise up our thoughts and affections to thyself, and grant us the pure enjoyment of thy spiritual service. So wean our affections from this world of sin, that we may be ready to meet thee in the day of thine appearing, when thou, the Sun of righteousness, shalt arise in thy glory.

WHIT-SUNDAY.

Most blessed Lord Jesus, who hast ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them, we pray of thee to bestow upon us the gift of the Holy Ghost. Thou who hast promised that thou wouldst send the Comforter to abide with thy Church for ever, send us we pray thee, this inestimable gift. May God the Holy Ghost dwell among us, and in us. May He, the Spirit of truth, guide us into all truth. May He glorify thee, by receiving of thine, and showing it unto us. O Lord Jesus, give us the Spirit, for holiness, for love, for crucifixion of the flesh, and understanding the depth of the mysteries of thy holy word. May the Spirit be in us a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. We ask this not for our own glory, but for thine. Glorify thy children, that they also may glorify thee. And bestow this precious gift, O Lord, on all the members of thy mystical body, that thy Church may shine as a light in the world—a city set upon an hill, that cannot be hid.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons, and one God, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners. O Eternal Father, who hast so loved a guilty world as to give thine only Son, Jesus Christ, to die upon the cross for sinners, receive us while we come to thee, through him.

O adorable Lord Jesus, who didst leave the Father's glory—who didst visit this earth in mercy—who didst suffer shame and reproach and persecution, and death, for us miserable sinners, hear us, while through thee our atoning High Priest, we draw near to the throne of grace. In

thee we trust—to thee we cling, as our only refuge from the wrath to come.

O God the Holy Ghost, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, shine into our hearts, and reveal the Father's love in the face of Jesus Christ. Fill us with thy power. Shine upon the cross of Jesus; and make known to us those hidden depths and treasures of his love, which the unconverted heart cannot receive. Dwell in each of us now before thee; and may each be a temple of the Holy Ghost. May our hearts bear witness to the glorious Trinity, by experiencing the Father's love—the Son's redemption—and the Spirit's sanctifying power.

IN THE EMBER WEEKS

TO BE SAID EVERY DAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE TO BE ADMITTED INTO HOLY ORDERS.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who hast purchased to thyself an universal Church by the precious blood of thy dear Son,—mercifully look upon the same and at this time, so guide and govern the minds of thy servants, the Bishops and Pastors of thy flock, that they may lay hands suddenly on no man, but faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons to serve in the sacred ministry of thy Church. And to those who shall be ordained to any holy function, give thy grace and heavenly benediction—that both by their life and doctrine they may set forth thy glory and set forward the salvation of all men; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

BEFORE THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Create within us, O God, a greater hungering and thirsting for that spiritual food, of which we are this day invited to partake. Blessed Lord Jesus, who art the bread of life, feed our souls. Meet us at that feast, which thou thyself in love hast spread. We would show forth thy death, till thou dost come. Be thou at thine own table, we pray thee. Make thyself known to us, in the breaking of bread. May our hearts rejoice, while we receive the tokens of thy dying love. May we, being very members incorporate in thee, be partakers of thy most precious body and blood. May spiritual strength and nourishment be communicated to us. May we have a blessed foretaste of that unspeakable joy, which we hope for, when we shall sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb in our Father's kingdom. O Lord Jesus, our adorable Saviour, bring us to thy banquetting house, and may thy banner over us be love. May we see and feel thy love, as we never felt before. Display new glories to our souls, and call forth new songs of thankfulness and praise.

AFTER THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Bless us, we pray thee, O our God, who have this day been partakers of the token of a Saviour's love. For whatever enjoyment was given us

at that spiritual feast, to thee be all the praise. For whatever coldness or deadness we experienced, to ourselves be all the shame. O Lord, we have presented to thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and a lively sacrifice. We have dedicated ourselves anew to thy service. We have pledged ourselves to follow thee, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our lives. We have professed to be followers of a crucified Saviour. We have shown forth his death, and expressed our desire to be conformed to his life. The vows of our God are upon us. O gracious Lord, confirm our self-dedication made this day. Give us the Spirit to help our weakness, and to bring our intentions to good effect. As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so let us walk in him. May we never withdraw those hearts which we have this day solemnly dedicated to thee. Having tasted of the heavenly gift, may we never again hunger or thirst after the things of this world.

FOR A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY WHEN SICK.

O Lord our God, who art the comforter of those that are cast down, our strength in weakness, our support in sickness, look with compassion we pray thee, for the sake of Jesus, upon the member of our family, upon whom thou hast been pleased to lay thy afflictive hand, in sickness. It is thy doing, O Lord, and we bow before thy sovereign will. All affliction is at thy command. Thou dost say, come, and it cometh; and thou dost say, go, and it goeth. If it be thy merciful will, speak the word, and thy servant shall be healed. Remove what thou thyself hast sent. Yet, Lord, we would say, not as we will, but as thou wilt. Grant *him* patience to bear what thou dost impose. May *he* neither despise the chastening of the Lord; nor faint when rebuked by thee. Manifest thyself to *his* soul; and grant that this affliction may be the means of drawing *him* more closely to thee; may the sickness of the body tend to the improvement of the health of the soul.

WHEN DANGEROUSLY ILL.

We plead with thee, O Lord, for thy suffering servant, in this house. We beseech of thee, if it be for thy glory, or for *his* spiritual good, let this cup pass from *him*. Nevertheless, not as we will, but as thou wilt. Grant *him* patience under suffering, and a happy issue in life or in death, out of this *his* affliction. When *his* flesh and heart do fail, be thou the strength of *his* heart, and *his* portion for ever. O Lord, reveal thyself to *him*, in this *his* time of need. Wash away *his* sins in the Saviour's blood, and sanctify *him* by the Holy Spirit. May he be enabled to say, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. May thy comforts refresh *his* soul. May *he* now taste that the Lord is gracious. May Jesus be precious to *him;* and may *he* find in him all grace to help, in this *his* time of need.

WHEN A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY IS DEAD.

O Lord, our heavenly Father, who dost not willingly afflict thy chil-

dren, but dost chasten them for their good, look upon us in pity we pray thee, who now are suffering under thy heavy chastisement. Thou, Lord, hast given, and thou hast taken away: enable us to add—blessed be the name of the Lord. For the loan that thou didst give us, of thy departed servant, we praise thee. Give us now the power of the Spirit, to bear the loss from which we suffer. O blessed Lord Jesus, who art touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who art a sympathizing Saviour, we commend ourselves to thee. Heal the wound which thou hast inflicted. Satisfy us with thyself; fill us with thyself, that we may find our all in thee. Bless to our souls, we pray thee, this heavy visitation. May it tend to wean our affections from the things of this vain and transitory world. May we find it better to be in the house of mourning, than in the house of feasting; and enable each of us to say, it was good for me to be afflicted. Prepare us all for the solemn hour of death. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom; and so bring us under the teaching of the Spirit, that living only for thy glory, we may know that when the earthly house of our tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

ON THE RECOVERY OF A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY.

We praise thee, O God, for thine unmerited mercy, in that thou hast raised thy servant, in this our family, from the bed of sickness. We bless thee, that though thou didst chasten *him* sore, yet hast thou not given *him* over unto death. O, that the life which thy goodness has renewed, may now be, unreservedly, dedicated to thee! Thou hast had mercy, not on *him* only, but on us also, lest we should have sorrow upon sorrow. For this we praise thee. Thou hast delivered *his* soul from death, *his* eyes from tears, and *his* feet from falling. Give *him* now, grace, we pray thee, to walk before thee in the land of the living; to offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving; to call upon thy name, and to pay *his* vows unto thee. May *he* not forget to return thanks unto the Lord; may *he* never spend, in the pursuit of worldly vanity, that life which thou hast graciously spared. O, may this chastisement yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness in *him*, by leading *him* to walk more closely with thee. And may we too, remembering our latter end, the vanity of the things of time, the reality of the things of eternity, so walk in life, that we may always be ready for the hour of death.

IN THE TIME OF PESTILENCE.

O Almighty God, who in thy wrath didst send a plague upon thine own people in the wilderness, for their obstinate rebellion against Moses and Aaron; and also, in the time of king David, didst slay with the plague of pestilence, threescore and ten thousand; and yet, remembering thy mercy, didst save the rest; have pity upon us, miserable sinners, who now are visited with great sickness and mortality; that like as thou didst command the destroying angel to cease from punishing, so it may now please thee to withdraw from us this plague of sickness, for the

sake of Jesus. We praise thee that we have yet been spared; and that thou hast not cut off those amongst us, who are yet in their sins. O, wash us all in the fountain of the Saviour's blood; sanctify us by the Holy Spirit. Turn our hearts from the love of worldly things. Take from us the fear of death, and make us joyful in the hope of the glory that is to be revealed; that we may be always ready to go hence at thy call.

FORMS OF INTERCESSION.

ONE OR MORE OF WHICH MAY BE INTRODUCED INTO EACH OF THE DAILY PRAYERS, WHERE THE FOLLOWING MARK OCCURS. [*]

FOR THE HOUSEHOLD.

We beseech thee, of thy goodness, O Lord, and for the Saviour's sake, to bestow upon this family the blessings of the Gospel of peace. Enable those who rule to do so in the fear of the Lord, with all forbearance and gentleness, knowing that they also have a master in heaven. Teach those who serve to act not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but with good will, as to the Lord. May each member of this family be endued with the power of the Spirit, and be brought under the influence of the Gospel of Christ, that we may be an household fearing God, and working righteousness; that all anger, and wrath, and clamour, and evil speaking, may be put away from us; and that the service of love may prevail over that of rigour or of fear. May the peace of God rule in all our hearts, and may we enjoy and exhibit the blessedness of them who dwell together in unity; so that walking in the faith of the Gospel, we all may be found in the household of faith.

FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

Bless, O Lord, all our relatives and friends. Lord, we carry them in the arms of faith, and lay them before thee, and say, heal them for thy mercy's sake. Pour out thy Spirit upon them, O Lord. Turn them from darkness to light,—from the love of the world to the love of thee. Whatever thou mayest take from them of the things of this life, O take not away thy loving-kindness, but save their immortal souls. May all who are dear to us by the ties of nature, be made still more dear by the stronger bonds of grace.

FOR ABSENT MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY.

O thou whose eyes are every where, who art God over all, blessed for ever, we pray thee, for the sake of Jesus, to guard and protect, and bless the members of this family now absent from us. Watch over them for

good. Preserve them from dangers, both of body and soul. Keep them in thy faith and fear. Draw them and us each day more closely to thee, that so we may be closer to each other in the bonds of the Gospel of peace. Manifest thyself to their souls. Give them an abundant measure of thy Holy Spirit. Teach them to live less for the world, and more with a single eye to thy glory. However separated here below, keep us rejoicing in the prospect of the glory that is to be revealed, when all thy scattered children shall meet in the city of their God, to part no more.

FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE FAMILY.

Blessed Jesus, who hast given us the rich promises of the Gospel, we beseech thee to hear our petitions in behalf of the children of this family, whom we now present in the arms of faith before thee. We ask not for them any thing of this world's goods. Do thou with them in this life as seemeth good unto thee. But bless thou their precious and immortal souls. Call them early by thy grace, O Lord. Give them thy Holy Spirit. Convert them to the knowledge and love of thee. Adopt them into thy family, and teach them to walk as thy beloved children. May their parents and teachers instruct them, both by precept and example, and may their instructions be blessed to their souls. May they not be trained after the course and fashion of this world, but with a simple view to their eternal glory in the world to come.

FOR THE CHURCH.

Almighty God, who hath directed us to pray always, with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit, for all saints, we desire now to plead with thee, for all our fellow-members incorporate in the mystical body of the Lord Jesus Christ. O ever blessed Jesus, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, who art the head of the body—the Church, we pray thee for that portion of thy body now militant here on earth. Do thou, who hast received the Spirit for the Church, grant that each member may be endued with power from on high—and be filled with the Spirit. May all who profess thy holy name, agree in the truth of thy holy word; and live in unity and godly love. Diffuse the spirit of love throughout thy body, that all may be of one heart and of one mind; may brotherly love prevail; may the hearts of all who shall hereafter be bound together in the bundle of life, be knit together here in the bonds of the Gospel. May the savour of sanctity, the beauty of holiness, be found with each, to the praise of thy glory. Prepare thy bride to meet thee at thy coming; and hasten thy kingdom, when thou shalt be glorified in thy saints, and they with thee.

FOR THE QUEEN AND ROYAL FAMILY.

We beseech thee, O Lord, so to rule the heart of thy chosen servant, our Queen and Governor, that she may be inclined to thy will; and walking in thy way, may rule the people, over whom thou hast placed

her, in thy faith and fear, and according to thy holy word. Let her throne be established in righteousness; and let her glory be great in thy salvation. Anoint her with the Holy Spirit. Bless her soul with the knowledge of thy truth; and direct all her acts to the furtherance of thy Gospel. Bless all the Royal Family. Endue them with the Holy Spirit; enrich them with thy heavenly grace; prosper them with all happiness; and bring them to thine everlasting kingdom.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COUNTRY.

Bless our rulers, we pray thee, O Lord; direct our Governors; and give our Senators that wisdom, that cometh from thee; that all their consultations may tend to the advancement of thy glory and the good of thy Church. May thy Spirit rule in all their hearts; and may thy word be the rule of all their actions. O, protect us, ever, from unholy laws; and defend us from the evil of unfaithful Governors.

FOR OUR COUNTRY.

Look in pity, we pray thee, upon our native land. Heal its divisions and distractions; and pour the oil of the Spirit upon its troubled waters. May that righteousness which exalteth a nation be our's, and put away from us that sin which is a reproach to any people. Have mercy upon those of its inhabitants who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Raise up faithful men, to declare to them the Gospel of thy grace. Open a door for the effectual preaching of thy holy word; and bless those that read it, by the power of the Spirit; so that thy truth may be known amongst men—thy saving health to this nation. Grant a special blessing to the Church which thou hast established in these realms—that its usefulness may be increased, its ministers be more faithful, and its members more spiritual.

FOR THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

Bless the Ministers of thy Gospel in our land. Send down upon all Bishops, and Curates, the healthful Spirit of thy grace. Strengthen the hand—enrich the hearts—and bless the work of those faithful shepherds, who labour for the sake of Jesus. Give them souls for their hire; and may their crown of rejoicing be bright in the day of the Lord. But O God, we beseech thee to convert those who have run, unsent, into the work of the ministry; and those who labour for filthy lucre's sake. May thy Spirit cause those to see, who undertake to lead the blind; and may all who minister in holy things, be examples to their flock, in purity, in deadness to the world, in self-denial and devotedness to thee.

FOR MISSIONARIES.

Gracious Lord Jesus, who didst command thy disciples to go into all nations, and preach the Gospel to every creature: we ask thy blessing upon thy faithful servants who have gone forth, in thy name, and accord-

ing to thy will, to publish thy salvation in heathen lands. Grant them an abundant measure of thy Holy Spirit. May they shine as lights in the dark places of the earth. May thy truth be glorified by their means. May the supplies of thy Spirit be more than equal to the trials which they may be called to endure. May they be faithful unto death. As they go forth, do thou stir up the hearts of thy people, to send them on their way. May they so live the life of Jesus, as to preach by the holiness of their lives; and may they be the honoured instruments of turning many from darkness to light.

FOR THE JEWS.

O merciful Saviour, look with compassion upon the benighted children of Israel. O thou who didst say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," bless now thine ancient people. Pour out thy Spirit upon their seed, and thy blessing upon their offspring. Take thou the veil from their hearts. Graft them into their own olive tree. Cause them to look to thee whom they have pierced, and mourn. May their hearts be stirred to seek and find, in thee, their long-expected Messiah; and may the blood which they once called down in vengeance upon their heads, be to them the blood of sprinkling and of pardon. Hasten the fulfilment of thy purposes, O Lord, to this nation. Lead thou them back to their own land. But, above all, reveal Jesus to them, by the Spirit, as the way, the truth, and the life. Bless those who labour amongst them; and guide them, by the Spirit, to testify of Jesus.

FOR THE HEATHEN.

Most gracious Lord, who hast bestowed upon us the unspeakable gift of the Gospel of Christ, we would remember before thee those heathen nations, who now sit in that darkness which once enveloped our land. O Lord, have mercy upon them. And thou, Lord Jesus, who art a light to the Gentiles, as well as the glory of thy people Israel, send out the Spirit with power, to accompany the preaching of thy word, in the dark places of the earth. Gather out thy people from amongst them. And whilst thy Gospel is a witness among all nations, may it be the power of God to the salvation of many who hear it. Set forth thine own glory, O Lord, by the conversion of sinners; and add unto thy Church, daily, from among the heathen, such as shall be saved.

FOR THE GLORIOUS KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

We hail the day, O blessed Lord Jesus, when thou shalt return to this earth in glory. We long for the time, O adorable Saviour, when thou shalt appear in thy kingdom. May that kingdom come, when thy will shall be done on earth as now it is in heaven;—when thy way shall be known upon earth and thy saving health among all nations. O, hasten thy coming, when thou, the Sun of Righteousness, shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion; when the Gentiles shall come to thy light,

and kings to the brightness of thy rising;—when thy people shall be all righteous;—when the earth shall be full of thy glory;—when all nations shall call thee blessed;—when thou, the King, shalt rule in righteouness;—when thou shalt reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before thine ancients, gloriously. O, give the Spirit, with power, to thy Church, that we may be raised above this world, and worldly things; and being, even now, partakers of thy grace, may we be so filled with joy at the prospect of thy coming, as to count all earthly things but loss for thy sake. Fill us with the light and comfort of thy Holy Spirit; so shall we joyfully exclaim—COME, LORD JESUS, COME QUICKLY.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. AMEN.

FORMS OF BLESSINGS.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the love of God; and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, evermore. AMEN.

The Lord bless us, and keep us. The Lord make his face to shine upon us, and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and give us peace, now, and for evermore. AMEN.

May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And may the blessing of God Almighty—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst us, and remain with us always. AMEN.

END OF VOL. I

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